Towards a theology of evangelism for late modern cultures : a critical dialogue with Lesslie Newbigin's doctrine of revelation

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Towards a Theology of Evangelism for Late-modern Cultures

- a critical dialogue with Lesslie Newbigin's doctrine of revelation

by

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to establish a dialogue between evangelism and theology in late-modern contexts by drawing on the writings of missionary-theologian Lesslie Newbigin. The dissertation argues for the first time that the hermeneutical key to Newbigin's work is the doctrine of revelation. The thesis assesses the resources provided by Newbigin's doctrine of revelation for evangelistic practice. Newbigin's own triangular model of missionary communication is used as the structural framework of the dissertation, where the three corners of the triangle represent gospel, culture, and congregation.

Investigation of the first corner of the triangle, the gospel, highlights many strengths of Newbigin's theological approach to evangelism. Newbigin centres his articulation of the gospel on the unique revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Newbigin combines confidence in the historicity of the gospel events with a deep appreciation of the power of narrative to communicate with late-modern listeners and thus provides an effective non-foundationalist Christian apologetic.

The second corner of Newbigin's triangle, culture, while promising, is shown to be less satisfactory. This partly reflects Newbigin's sociologically unformed approach to culture (especially popular forms). But the primary weakness, the thesis argues, lies in Newbigin's inadequate application of his own doctrine of general revelation. This leads to Newbigin's exclusively negative evaluation of western culture.

In the third side of the triangle, congregation, the thesis applies an original analysis to Newbigin's revelatory ecclesiology outlining three overlapping emphases: the congregation as missional community, eschatological foretaste, and united body. These emphases find their intersection in the church as a pneumatological hermeneutic of the gospel.

In conclusion the dissertation suggests further lines of research into gospel and culture and commends Newbigin's theology of evangelism, despite some reservations, as a positive and powerful tool in the theory and practice of mission in late-modern contexts.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

-The need for a theology of evangelism for late-modern contexts and the appropriateness of Lesslie Newbigin as a theological dialogue partner

1.1 The need for a theology of evangelism

There is an embarrassing silence[1] on the subject of evangelism in contemporary theological reflection. Andrew Walker states; "it is virtually impossible to find… evangelism being taken seriously in theological and ecclesiastical circles."[2] In the academy the embarrassment seems to be due to the difficulty in relating the historic commitment of the church to the universal truthfulness of the gospel with contemporary pluralistic Western cultures; increasingly this is not only politically incorrect but, due to a crisis of epistemology,[3] intellectually more difficult to affirm. Thus a gulf between evangelism and theological reflection has developed. J.I. Packer argues that when theology is divorced from evangelism: "it grows abstract and speculative, wayward in method, theoretical in interest and irresponsible in stance."[4] Similarly Stanley Hauerwas states that "theology divorced from the practices of the church cannot help but become ideology, no matter how orthodox it may be."[5] James Denney the nineteenth century Scottish theologian offers an alternative model proposing that: "if evangelists were our theologians or theologians our evangelists, we should be nearer the ideal, for the evangelist is in the last resort the judge of theology."[6] This thesis is driven by the conviction that theology ought to be by its very nature evangelistic and evangelism ought to be by its very nature theological.

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[1] Abraham(1994):117
[2] Walker(1991):v
[3] Vanhoozer & Kirk(2000):3
[4] Packer(1976):91
[5] Hauerwas & Willimon(1991):424
[6] Denney(1902):vii

The academic silence on evangelism is also due to many who are involved in evangelistic practice failing to engage in significant theological reflection. As a result, evangelistic pragmatism often ensues and evangelistic methodologies are passed on a-critically, with theologically suspect assumptions being widely adopted due to expediency rather than biblical faithfulness. A further resultant danger is that methods which may have been effective in one historical and cultural context are employed *ad hoc* in radically different contexts with limited effectiveness and, more significantly, often a distortion of the gospel. This leads to the paradox that those most concerned with the conservation and communication of the gospel are those most at risk of distorting it. Theological reflection on evangelism and evangelistic reflection on theology must be undertaken to avoid the distortion of the gospel and to promote genuine evangelistic communication.

The American missiologist Wilbert Shenk states: "the evangelist and the theologian have never enjoyed an easy relationship in modern times."[7] Evangelism for too long has been relegated to a subset of pastoral theology and as a result has become divorced from mainstream theological reflection and left instead in the hands of pragmatic practitioners. Once this divorce has taken place evangelism seeks a new partner and more often than not it is what sociologist Max Weber described as instrumental rationality. This is not a neutral partner but an ideology that soon defines success in evangelism in terms of efficiency, predictability and quantifiability.[8] Once instrumental rationality becomes a partner, evangelism soon resembles marketing, and the evangelist the businessman. This thesis argues that evangelism demands theology as its partner as evangelism that is theologically uninformed ends up as ideological propaganda, and theology that is not evangelistically informed ends up sterile, isolationist and far

[7] Shenk (1995):70
[8] described recently as McDonaldisation see Ritzer(2000)

removed from the missionary God of authentic Christianity. It follows Andrew Kirk's call for theology to rediscover its real identity and purpose as a "resource in the service of God's mission to bring all things into subjection to Christ."[9]

1.2 The need for contextualised theological reflection

Andrew Walls describes the tension between two key principles that have driven the expansion of Christianity over the millennia; the pilgrim and the indigenising principles. Christianity throughout the ages has always maintained a "continuity of thought about the final significance of Jesus"[10] for the world and thus it has had a universal pilgrim impetus to take the gospel to all the nations. But, because of the impossibility of "separating an individual from his social relationships"[11] there has always been an indigenising principle at work in Christian mission. Therefore the centrality of the incarnation in the message of the church has influenced the church's missionary methodology. The tension between the pilgrim and the indigenising principles has led to three main responses to cultures: cultural imperialism, cultural syncretism and the (re)contextualisation of the gospel. Imperialism and syncretism both involve distortions of the gospel and yet are often unwittingly perpetrated by those most concerned with evangelism. Usually due to a lack of cultural self-criticism, often insufficient attention has been given to the dialectical relationship between the church and its cultural context. The only genuine resolution to the tension between the pilgrim and indigenising principles is the (re)contextualisation of the gospel, and this is the elusive goal of all biblically faithful Christian witness.

Theology must be self-consciously contextual as making explicit the cultural context in which theologising takes place increases the possibility of avoiding the Scylla of

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[9] Kirk(1997):42
[10] Walls(1996a):7
[11] Walls(1996a):7

imperialism and the Charbydis of syncretism. Douglas Hall writes: "Contextualisation … is the *sine qua non* of all genuine theological thought, and always has been."[12] Hall's statement is slightly misleading as the term contextualisation assumes that there is such a thing as non-contextualised theology. Because theology is always contextualised, as theologians practise their art as contextually located subjects, "(re)contextualisation"[13] provides a more accurate term. Nevertheless Hall's statement is helpful as it recognises that historically theologians have sought, whether consciously or unconsciously, to discourse about God in culturally relevant ways. The great patristic theologians sought to expound the Christian faith within the context of neo-platonic Greek thought. This served both the function of finding apologetic resources for defending the veracity of the gospel in that context but also ways of preserving the gospel by stating the church's doctrine in terms that the cultural-linguistic milieu provided. Thus theology is at its heart a contextualised discipline. If re-contextualisation is necessary for theology then it is critical for a theology of evangelism. Evangelism is essentially theological as it is discourse (*logos*) about God (*Theos*) with the intention of persuading others. Therefore any attempt at a theology of evangelism must be self-consciously contextual. Awareness of the cultural context of late-modernity and the ways in which the gospel was re-contextualised in modernity will be a significant emphasis in this thesis. This thesis is not aiming to produce a micro-contextual theology of evangelism, for example a theology of evangelism for the pastor of a multicultural evangelical church in a London suburb in rapid transition from a middle class white majority to one with a majority of nominally Hindu Kenyan immigrants of Indian descent, which is the context of the author. Such a theology of evangelism would not necessarily help the wider church. But equally the danger of producing a contextually dislocated theology of evangelism is

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[12] Hall, D.J. (1989) *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context*, Minneapolis:21 Augsburg cited in Bevans, S.B. (1992):21

[13] as far as can be discerned this term was coined by Elisha Eves formerly at London School of Theology

very real. The thesis aims to provide a prolegomena to locally (re)contextualised theologies of evangelism.

1.3 The need to reconsider evangelism in late-modern contexts

Ernest Gellner, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, states that: "Post-modernism is a contemporary movement. It is strong and fashionable. Over and above this, it is not altogether clear what the devil it is."[14] The term postmodernity is notoriously difficult to define but it does seem to intimate a definite break or leaving behind of modernity. Vinoth Ramachandra agues that postmodernity "is best understood as a continuation of the process of modernisation but with increasing intensity and scope… the result of that intensification has been to erode the stability of modernity and throw it into some confusion."[15] Rather than moving beyond modernity Ulrich Beck describes the phenomenon of "modernity turning upon itself"[16] resulting in 'reflexive-modernity.'[17] Zygmunt Bauman argues that this is the modernization of modernity.[18] Jean François Lyotard's oft-quoted definition of postmodernity as "incredulity regarding metanarratives"[19] fits within this description of reflexive modernity as the critical tools of modernity have been applied to the very assumptions of modernity itself, resulting in scepticism towards all overarching descriptions including that of modernity itself. This thesis assumes a reflexive understanding of modernity and thus, following Anthony Giddens[20], the term late-modernity will be adopted in preference to postmodernity. There will therefore be no further references to postmodernity and where authors have interacted with this reflexive model of modernity, their work will be labelled late-modern.

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[14] Gellner(1992):22
[15] Ramachandra(1996):3
[16] Bauman(2000):6
[17] Bauman(2000):6
[18] Bauman(2000):28
[19] Lyotard(1997):xxiv
[20] Giddens(1991):70 see also Walker's analysis of Jameson & Harvey in Walker (1991):

1.4 Usefulness of Newbigin as a dialogue partner

1.4a Newbigin the experienced evangelist

Lesslie Newbigin's biography demonstrates his appropriateness as a dialogue partner for a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures. Born in 1909 in Northumbria the son of a Presbyterian businessman he attended a Quaker boarding school and went on to study Geography and Economics at Cambridge University. Newbigin records his conversion taking place during the first summer break as a student whilst on a Quaker-organised social action project taking a group of sixty unemployed welsh miners camping. During a night in which most of the men were inebriated Newbigin retired to his tent in despair feeling he had nothing to contribute to the welfare of these miners. It was there that Newbigin had an experience that changed his life forever:

> "As I lay awake a vision came to mind, perhaps arising from something I had read a few weeks before by William Temple. It was a vision of the cross, but it was the cross spanning the space between heaven and earth, between ideals and present realities, and with arms that embraced the whole world."[21]

This literally crucial point in Newbigin's life shaped his understanding of the atonement and became the foundation of his experience of new life in Christ. He became increasingly involved in the Student Christian Movement (SCM) and on graduation in 1931 was appointed one of their Scottish national staff workers. After completing two years service with the SCM, Newbigin returned to Cambridge for theological training at Westminster College and it was here that a momentous turning-point in Newbigin's theology took place. Through reading James Denney's commentary on Romans Newbigin discovered the centrality of the death of Jesus and describes his experience in his autobiography:

> "I began the study as a typical liberal. I ended it with a strong conviction about the 'finished work of Christ,' about the centrality and objectivity of the atonement accomplished on Calvary."[22]

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[21] Newbigin(1985d):11
[22] Newbigin(1985d):30

Newbigin goes so far as to describe himself after that event as "much more of an evangelical than a liberal."[23] After graduating in 1936 Newbigin served as a missionary in India with the Church of Scotland until 1947 at which time he was appointed the youngest Bishop in the newly formed Church of South India (which Newbigin had been instrumental in founding). Newbigin served as Bishop at Madurai and Ramnad until 1959 when he was seconded to work in London with the International Missionary Council (IMC). There he oversaw the combining of the IMC with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and from 1962 he was seconded to Geneva to work on the newly formed Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC. He returned to India to become the Bishop of Madras in 1965 and on his retirement in 1974 was awarded the honour of Commander of the Order of the British Empire. He returned from Madras to England by bus with only two suitcases and a rucksack to take up a lectureship at the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham. Newbigin describes his experience of ministry on return to England as

> "much harder than anything I met in India. There is a cold contempt for the Gospel which is harder to face than any opposition… England is a pagan society and the development of a truly missionary encounter with this very tough form of paganism is the greatest intellectual and practical task facing the Church."[24]

It was this missionary reverse culture shock that prompted Newbigin at the age of 65 to undertake his most significant theological and missiological project, the 'Gospel and Our Culture' (GOC) programme. During his five year lectureship at Selly Oak Newbigin also served as the Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church (URC). In 1980 Newbigin took up an unsalaried position as a URC minister of a declining congregation in a deprived area of Birmingham, the multicultural Winson Green. He served there for eight years and then retired to London but was still an active speaker and author with the GOC movement. Newbigin's experience as a

[23] Newbigin(1985d):31
[24] Newbigin(1985d):249

para-church staff worker, ecumenical advocate, missionary theologian, evangelist, pastor and theological educator give his writings a firm grounding in missionary praxis rather than purely academic speculation. Because Newbigin's theology was hammered out on the anvil of missional experience, he does not suffer the problems that Hauerwas and Packer highlighted earlier of divorcing theology from church praxis. Newbigin's broad-ranging experience of mission and evangelism and of ecumenical involvement, gave him a unique perspective on the nature and theology of evangelism. Combined with Newbigin's experience as a returning missionary that no longer felt at home in his country of origin, this provided the impetus for his missiological encounter with late-modern western cultures and provides an excellent basis for exploring a contextualised theological approach to evangelism.

1.4b Newbigin the strategic thinker

Newbigin's work offers a challenge to a systematic approach as his writing was extensive and *ad hoc*. Newbigin's first article was published by the SCM in 1933 and his most recent publication was a posthumous collection of unpublished essays in 2003. During these seventy years Newbigin was published 387 times as well as having an extensive correspondence, much of which has been preserved. A systematic treatment of Newbigin's work is also challenged by the generally non-systematic nature of his work. Shenk describes Newbigin's work as theology "on the run"[25] as most of his writing was in response to a question or an invitation to lecture. For example Newbigin's book "The Household of God"[26] was written from his Kerr Lectures at the University of Glasgow and "Foolishness to the Greeks"[27] from his 1984 Warfield lectures at Princeton. Newbigin did not consider himself a "professional theologian" and

[25] Shenk(1998):3
[26] Newbigin(1953)
[27] Newbigin(1986c)

he wrote in his introduction to "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society"[28] that "I can make no claim to either originality or to scholarship. I am a pastor and a preacher."[29] Shenk describes Newbigin not as a systematic theologian but rather as "a strategic thinker."[30] This description highlights Newbigin's keen eye for emerging issues, seeking not to be exhaustive but to help the church grasp the key challenges and opportunities for mission.

1.4c Newbigin the ecumenical evangelical

Newbigin also brings theological breadth to the discussion of the theology of evangelism. He constantly challenges both those he labels as liberals/ecumenicals and evangelicals in their theological presuppositions.

> "All seriously committed Christians presumably believe that the gospel is for the whole world. The *evangel* is for the *oikoumene*. It is therefore strange and sad that the adjectives 'evangelical' and 'ecumenical' should have come in our time to stand for mutually opposed positions… every Christian must be evangelical and ecumenical."[31]

This is an accurate description of Newbigin's theological position. David Bebbington has developed what he terms the evangelical theological quadrilateral to describe the defining characteristics of evangelicals.

- The priority of the Bible
- An emphasis on conversion, whether gradual or instantaneous
- A system of theology centred on the cross of Christ and the atonement
- A commitment to action: an ethic requiring faith to be evidenced in deeds [32]

Newbigin appears broadly evangelical by Bebbington's standards. As will be apparent in this thesis Newbigin gives the Bible a central place. He also has a strong theology of conversion and as is apparent from his own conversion experience and writings he has a strong emphasis on the atonement and the need for definite action as a result of faith.

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[28] Newbigin(1989e)
[29] Newbigin(1989e):x
[30] Shenk(1998):3
[31] Newbigin(1982b):146
[32] Bebbington(1989):1-19

Newbigin also argues that the central revelatory moment in the gospel narrative is the cross of Christ.

Newbigin was also clearly ecumenical in his practice. Newbigin genuinely sought to be both ecumenical and evangelical and David Bosch, who sought a similar creative tension in his theology, wrote:

> "it seems to me that those evangelicals who belong to churches affiliated to the WCC have a unique role to play in bridging the divide between the two movements. They stand with their feet in two worlds, as it were, and are, as insiders, in a position to counteract the stereotypes peoples in the one "camp" have of those in the other."[33]

Newbigin's ability to span this divide between ecumenicals and evangelicals is noteworthy and again allows him to draw on a large corpus of theological tradition that lends eclectic and ecumenical breadth to his theologising.

1.4d Newbigin engages directly with late-modernity

Some may argue that Newbigin's work, because it is focussed on modernity, has no relevance for the current context of late-modernity. It is true that Newbigin felt with some urgency the need to address modernity. From his vantage point in global ecumenical mission he could see that the church was strongest and growing most rapidly in "cultures that have not been shaped by "modern" Western culture."[34] Thus Newbigin's focus in the latter half of his life was to address the issues around the communication of the gospel in Western cultures. Newbigin argues that

> "[i]n spite of its erosion by the growing movement of 'deconstruction' among intellectuals in the 'developed' societies, modernism is still the major challenge which the world faces, primarily because it is embodied in the global economic-financial-industrial system which is now more powerful than even the most powerful nation-states and which is rapidly engulfing traditional societies and their 'autonomous economies' into mindless operations."[35]

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[33] Bosch(1988a):471
[34] Newbigin(1991i):26
[35] Newbigin(1996a):8

This citation offers several clues to assess Newbigin's evaluation of the cultural context in which he wrote. Newbigin refers most frequently to his context as "modernity" although he also uses the term postmodernity on a few occasions.[36] Newbigin argues that his engagement was primarily with modernity as it is "still in spite of the post-modernists, the dominant power in public debate."[37] This would appear to signal that Newbigin believes modernity is to be engaged with because it is still the dominant influence on contemporary western culture in the transition to postmodernity. However, Newbigin often describes modernity as a universal solvent citing the journalist and philosopher Walter Lippmann who in the 1930s made repeated references in his books and columns to what he called "the acids of modernity"[38] that relentlessly dissolve the most enduring beliefs in the western world. When Lippmann uses the term "acids of modernity" he employs it to describe the way that the specific presuppositions of the Christian worldview have been undermined:

> "It cannot support itself. If faith is to flourish, there must be a conception of how the universe is governed to support it. It is these supporting conceptions--the unconscious assumption that we are related to God as creatures to creator, as vassals to a king, as children to a father--that the acids of modernity have eaten away."[39]

Nevertheless Newbigin employs the term "acids of modernity" to describe a reflexive modernity which corresponds to the acceleration model and therefore he has a self-conscious engagement with late-modernity. Thus Newbigin provides an excellent dialogue partner for a theology of evangelism for late-modern culture as he engages theologically with late-modernity.

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[36] Newbigin(1996b):7, Newbigin(1996a):2
[37] Newbigin(1992e):6
[38] Newbigin does not provide a reference Lippmann(1929):51-65
[39] Lippmann(1929):55-56

To summarise Newbigin has been selected as a dialogue partner in seeking to develop a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures because of his evangelistic experience, his ecumenical exposure, and his engagement with late-modernity.

1.5 Defining Evangelism

In order to proceed in developing a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures a provisional definition of evangelism must be attempted. There is much debate on the nature of evangelism and in order to clarify Newbigin's definition of evangelism it will be explored through comparing and contrasting his position with that of the eminent South African missiologist David Bosch who participated in a lively exchange of articles with Newbigin on the nature of evangelism. In his *magnum opus* "Transforming Mission" Bosch outlines the main areas of contention when defining evangelism:

> "Controversy prevails in two areas: the differences (if any) between "evangelism" and "mission", and the scope or range of evangelism."[40]

Both Bosch and Newbigin agree that mission is to be understood as the wider concept and evangelism as the narrower.[41] Missiologist J.J. Kritzinger[42] notes three essential elements to Bosch's understanding of the relationship between mission and evangelism. These have been adapted into the following categories that will form the analytical basis for examining Bosch's and Newbigin's understanding of the relationship between mission and evangelism.

- Mission, evangelism and social involvement are non-synonymous
- Mission, evangelism and social involvement are inseparable
- Mission, evangelism and social involvement are inseparable and therefore equal priorities

1.5a Mission, evangelism and social involvement are non-synonymous

Bosch cites how the terms 'evangelism' and 'evangelisation' have begun to replace the term mission in the vocabulary not just of conservative evangelicals (who often

[40] Bosch(1990):409
[41] Bosch(1987):100
[42] Kritzinger(1990):147

understand mission to mean only evangelism) but also amongst Roman Catholics and ecumenical Protestants. Bosch cites *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John VI in 1975 as "the most thoroughgoing example of "evangelisation" supplanting mission"[43]: there is no mention of the word mission whilst the term evangelisation and its cognates occur 214 times. Evangelisation is seen as an umbrella term to describe the "whole of Christ's office and mandate."[44] Thus at both extremes of the theological spectrum evangelism and mission have been conflated into a synonym. In marked contrast to this position Bosch and Newbigin define mission and evangelism as clearly separate concepts: both follow John Stott in describing mission as: "the total task which God has set the church for the salvation of the world."[45] Mission is the widest possible term to describe the church's vocation in the world. Newbigin uses the word 'evangelism' exclusively for "an action of verbal communication in which the name of Jesus is central."[46] Bosch holds a clearly divergent opinion arguing vehemently against a solely verbal definition. For Bosch evangelism is the deliberate proclamation of the gospel through word and deed "calling people to repentance and faith in Christ,"[47] or as he states: "Evangelism is the inviting and in-gathering dimension of the total mission, whereas the other involvements represent the serving, self-emptying and humanising dimension."[48] Mission, as we shall see is intrinsically linked to this task but includes the totality of the church's calling which will not always have an evangelistic intention though it will always have an evangelistic dimension[49] or as Bosch puts it "the Church's entire nature is missionary, but she is not, in all her activities, explicitly aimed

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[43] Bosch(1991):411
[44] Bosch(1991):411
[45] Stott (1975):23 Bosch(1985):79
[46] Newbigin(1982b):149
[47] Bosch(1987):100
[48] Bosch(1982) cited in Kritzinger(1990):154
[49] Bosch(1980):199-200

at the world."[50] Thus both Bosch and Newbigin agree that mission and evangelism are non-synonymous, despite a marked contrast in their definitions of evangelism.

1.5b Mission, evangelism and social involvement are inseparable

Both Bosch and Newbigin refuse a dichotomy between verbal and practical proclamation of the gospel. Bosch argues this into his definition of evangelism, rejecting definitions that focus solely on "verbal categories"; he argues that this is not what was understood by the early church.[51] Bosch relies on the research of Richard B. Cook from the National Farm Worker Ministry in the USA who argues that the Greek word from which the verb "to evangelise" is derived is *euangelizesthai*. Bosch claims that the Greek language had a specific word for verbal proclamation "*kerusso*" and so evangelism should be defined more holistically and, according to Bosch, investigation of the use *kerusso* and *euangelizesthai* in Paul's writings show that he did not use them synonymously.[52] Cook argues that *euangelizesthai* is used most frequently in the epistle to the Galatians occurring there seven times out of a total of twenty-one occurrences in the whole of Paul's writings. Cook's work arguing from the context of Galatians leads Bosch to state:

> "Evangelism will of necessity consist of word *and* deed, proclamation *and* presence, explication *and* example…because "our deeds, our 'Christian presence' and our example are ambiguous. They need explication."[53]
>
> "the very heart of Paul's understanding of the gospel was in jeopardy. In this epistle more than any other, he wanted to demonstrate that the gospel was more than a new teaching or a new law but a radically new way of living".[54]

Bosch argues that since the modern concept "preach" is so culturally loaded with the concept of verbal proclamation we should follow Cook's suggestion and rather render

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[50] Bosch(1980):199
[51] Bosch(1984):180
[52] Bosch(1979):51
[53] Bosch(1984):180
[54] Bosch(1979):52

euangelizesthai as 'live the gospel' or 'embody the gospel in your midst.'[55] Newbigin's definition of evangelism as a verbal proclamation of the good news of the gospel is diametrically opposed to Bosch's and is supported by a wider range of New Testament scholars. For example, Michael Green sees three words as primary to the biblical understanding of evangelism,[56] *euaggelizesthai* (to 'tell good news') *kerrussein* (to 'proclaim') and *marturein* (to 'bear witness'). William Abraham who argues for a wider understanding of the term evangelism, concedes that "clearly the central verb used to cover the activity of evangelism, *euangelizomai*, is best translated by our verb to "proclaim". Hence to "evangelize" basically means the proclaiming of the good news of the gospel[57]. Bosch has theological assumptions at stake in his attempt to entwine evangelism and social involvement at all stages. He has conceded that there is a Greek word for verbal proclamation and it is used to refer to the gospel frequently. Indeed Newbigin argues early in his theological career commenting on the opening chapter of Mark's gospel that:

> "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God …There is no point- even at its very beginnings - where the gospel is something other than a thing preached a *kerygma*"[58].

Newbigin's observation is endorsed by Weston who states,

> "when the word gospel is used as a noun in the New Testament it is always combined with words of hearing and speaking when the process which we would understand as evangelism is being described. When it is being handed on to someone else it is described as being "preached" or "proclaimed", "heralded" or "spoken"… For example, the noun *euangelion* occurs 8 times in the gospels - always with the verb *kerusso* to preach, or proclaim."[59]

Bosch does not wish to deny the verbal aspect of evangelism but seeks to secure an indissoluble link between social involvement and verbal proclamation; this forces him

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[55] Cook(1981):491 cited in Bosch(1987):102 and (1984):180
[56] Green(1990):56
[57] Abraham(1994):118
[58] Newbigin(1948a):20-21
[59] Weston(1996):249

to import alien concepts onto the Greek word *euangelizesthai*. This does not diminish Bosch's argument that mission and evangelism are linked with social involvement, however the case seems more effectively demonstrated by Newbigin who argues for a clear conceptual distinction between the terms evangelism and mission, the former being a verbal proclamation and the latter the church's wider vocation in the world. Newbigin argues for the inseparability of social involvement and mission in large theological brushstrokes. A helpful summary article is contained in his response to Bosch in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research where Newbigin explores "cross-currents in ecumenical and evangelical understandings of mission."[60] Newbigin provides four theological justifications for the inseparability of evangelism and social action.

Incarnation

"It is the Word made flesh that is the gospel. The deed without the word is dumb, and the word without the deed is empty."[61] Newbigin argues that in the person of Jesus Christ the word and the deed are united and so joining Christ in God's mission will also mean emulating this.

Pneumatology

This argument is based on the momentous events surrounding Pentecost, where the working of the Spirit in the disciples prompted a call for an explanation of the events witnessed. Newbigin argues that this was the context for the church's first proclamation of the gospel and that it should serve as a model, with evangelism being understood as the explanation of the Spirit's work in the church as it involves itself in the community. Newbigin's point finds exegetical support in Peter's first epistle where he argues for the church to be ready to "present a reason for the hope that you have."[62]

Eschatology

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[60] Newbigin(1982b):146
[61] Newbigin(1982b):146
[62] 1 Peter3:15

Newbigin states that:

> "word and act belong together. The word is essential, because the name of Jesus cannot be replaced by anything else. But the deed is essential because the gospel is the good news of the active presence of the reign of God, and because this presence is to be made manifest in a world that has fallen under the usurped dominion of the evil one."[63]

Just as the first gospel preaching was in response to a question about the working of the Spirit, the Pentecost phenomena were explained in terms of eschatological fulfilment and the reign of God. Newbigin argues that "service and evangelism" are related to one another through understanding "the new reality, the presence of the Holy Spirit of Christ in a new community which is the body of Christ."[64] This theme will be explored under the rubric of the church as eschatological foretaste, but it is important to see here the eschatological justification of keeping word and deed, mission and evangelism together.

Anthropology

Newbigin states that "the Bible always sees the human person realistically as a living body-soul whose existence cannot be understood apart from the network of relationships that bind the person to family tribe, nation and all the progeny of Adam."[65] Newbigin contrasts Biblical holistic anthropology with that of Hinduism where 'the real human being' is only found when the contingent, historical and visible being is stripped away. Similarly the Biblical picture of salvation is "not in terms of disembodied survival, but in terms of the resurrection of the body, a new creation and the heavenly city."[66] Thus the eschatological destination of the church as an embodied existence militates against reductionist and dualistic approaches that seek to proclaim the gospel in order to save souls and not demonstrate the gospel in terms of caring for the whole person.

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[63] Newbigin(1982b):147-8
[64] Newbigin(1961b):92
[65] Newbigin(1982b):149
[66] Newbigin(1982b):149

Thus in this thesis Newbigin's definition of evangelism as verbal proclamation will be followed but Bosch's insistence of the link between word and deed will be also be assumed. Despite Bosch and Newbigin's arguments for the conceptual inseparability of word and deed, they both argue that:

> "Equally every[one]… must be ready with the word when called upon to give an account of his hope… Equally everyone must be ready to do the compassionate deed- even when Jesus is not recognised… But not every deed must have a word attached to it, nor every word a deed."[67]

Newbigin can argue this because of his understanding of the churches unity-in-diversity, where members have different gifts and opportunities and also because the church does not simply perform its social good works "with an eye upon possible conversions, but because these are the things that love must do."[68]

1.5c Mission, evangelism and social involvement are equal priorities

The primary debate between ecumenical and evangelical missiologists has been over the issue of the primacy or otherwise of evangelism. For Newbigin and Bosch because of the intrinsic inseparability of word and deed in mission and evangelism there can be no prioritisation of one over the other. As Newbigin writes, "no priorities can be assigned between them, because each without the other is ultimately vain."[69] Now that Newbigin's definition of evangelism has been examined it is appropriate to explore the location of evangelism within a systematic theological framework.

1.6 Locating evangelism as a facet of the doctrine of revelation

Professor Keith Ward commented that "there is no one proper starting-point in theology, since every question leads on to every other."[70] Thus a theology of

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[67] Newbigin(1982b):148
[68] Newbigin(1948a):19
[69] Newbigin(1982b):146
[70] Ward(1994):1

evangelism is influenced by a myriad of theological considerations. This thesis seeks to relate the human task of evangelism with the divine self-revelation of God to humanity.

The starting point for this thesis is to examine the means by which God communicates himself to humanity, and to use the doctrine of revelation to provide the overall framework to explore a theology of evangelism. This is a novel place to situate an articulation of a theology of evangelism as evangelism, if it receives any theological analysis at all, is usually placed within the confines of practical or pastoral theology.[71] There are a number of problems in locating evangelism under the rubric of practical theology. Firstly there is an implied bifurcation of theology into practical and non-practical or even worse 'impractical' theology! The existence of a discipline known as practical theology calls into question the nature and purpose of theology in general, a subject too vast to be explored here, but suffice to say that all Christian theology should serve God's purposes, which is intrinsically tied to the *Missio Dei* of which, as will be shown, evangelism is a central facet. Secondly by separating evangelism from the mainstream of theological reflection it is often left bereft of the resources of the centuries of systematic theological reflection and instead becomes allied to pragmatism.

At first sight locating the theology of evangelism as a subset of the doctrine of revelation seems to be unorthodox but there is a worthy precedent provided by the magisterial figure of Karl Barth. In his seminal work Church Dogmatics, Barth expounds the theme of the word of God by characteristically starting with God's revelation in Christ. Barth continues by exploring the revelation of God through Scripture and finally exploring God's revelation through the preaching of the church[72].

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[71] for example Woodward,J. & Pattison,S.(2000) a recent reader in practical and pastoral theology contained not a singly reference to mission or evangelism in its extensive index. There was however a single fleeting reference to mission and evangelism on page 83.

[72] Barth (1958B):743-853

Although Barth does not embark on a full-scale theology of evangelism, his location of the preaching of the gospel by the church within the remit of the doctrine of revelation provides sufficient historical precedent to locate evangelism here, although this thesis may very well be the first attempt to articulate systematically a theology of evangelism as part of the doctrine of revelation.

There is a problem in locating evangelism within the doctrine of revelation; if the notion of evangelism is distasteful in many academic environments, there is as much if not more antipathy towards this idea of divine revelation. Abraham argues "aversion of divine revelation runs deep in the contemporary academy"[73] citing four reasons for this antipathy. Firstly "the appeal to revelation is thought to be subjective and arbitrary"[74] as it is assumed there are no methods of verification possible. Secondly, "the appeal to revelation is believed to be radically divisive," as it breeds fanaticism and with it destroys "inclusivism and pluralism."[75] Thirdly the appeal to revelation is "thought to cut off reflection and reasoning" and fourthly it is often seen "as a disguised and illegitimate bid for authority and power."[76] In the light of these concerns Abraham agues that "what is needed is appropriate humility in the face of divine grace, imaginative and rigorous thinking in the wake of divine disclosure."[77]

1.6a The gospel as revelation

It requires almost a tautology to state it, but the revelation of the gospel is communicated through evangelism.[78] Even if the field of study was limited to Pauline gospel theology one would need to admit along with New Testament scholar Gordon Fee that "for Paul the 'gospel' had first of all to do with evangelism, with preaching

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[73] Abraham(2002):256
[74] Abraham(2002):256
[75] Abraham(2002):257
[76] Abraham(2002):257
[77] Abraham(2002):265
[78] Romans 10:14

Christ so that others believed on him, thus receiving the Spirit, and thereby becoming members of the newly constituted people of God."[79] Similarly Klyne Snodgrass writing on Paul's doctrine of revelation in the Roman epistle states: "the themes of revelation and mission belong together for Paul… when God reveals or is revealed, the recipient is enlisted to the purposes of God."[80] Therefore it is significant that evangelism is not normally examined under the rubric of the doctrine of revelation. Even an evangelical like Peter Jensen who argues in his work on the doctrine of revelation that "contemporary theology has lost touch with the missionary impetus of the Christian faith precisely when this is needed more than ever,"[81] fails to make the logical link between revelation in the gospel and the revelatory role of the church in evangelism. One possible explanation is that the concept of mediated revelation is distasteful as it is preferable to consider more immediate ways for God to communicate with humanity and not be faced with contingencies like the church's evangelistic mission. This argument is addressed head-on by Newbigin's theology of mission and particularly his ecclesiology as will demonstrated in chapter four. The New Testament does not share the sensibilities of those wary of mediated revelation. Paul can write: "we are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us"[82] or in describing his evangelistic ministry in Thessalonica: "when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the words of men, but as it actually is the word of God "[83] or again in Romans 10:14 "…faith comes from hearing the word of God, but how will they hear unless someone preaches to them". Now that the relationship between evangelism and the doctrine of revelation has been established, further exploration of the doctrine of revelation in a theology of evangelism is necessitated.

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[79] Fee(1994):112
[80] Snodgras(1994):314
[81] Jensen(2002):32
[82] 2 Corinthians5:20
[83] 1 Thessalonians2:13

1.6b The doctrine of revelation as the gathering point of Newbigin's theology

The case for Newbigin's selection as a partner for developing a theology of evangelism can be further strengthened when it is noted that his entire theological project finds its gathering point in his doctrine of revelation. It is surprising that Newbigin's theology has never before been analysed from the perspective of his doctrine of revelation. It has previously been assumed that Newbigin's theology can best be summarised through either the doctrine of election or through his missionary ecclesiology.

George Hunsberger's doctoral thesis demonstrates the importance of the doctrine of election for Newbigin's thought. Hunsberger observes: "election has persistently provided Newbigin with the clue for understanding mission."[84] Hunsberger's thesis has much to commend it as election is certainly a persistent and important factor in Newbigin's theology, but it can be seen that although election is a significant factor in Newbigin's theology it is subservient to the central role that the doctrine of revelation plays in Newbigin's thought. One of Newbigin's earliest extant writings is a paper entitled "Revelation" written in 1936 during his theological studies at Westminster College Cambridge. It is here that Newbigin expounds his understanding of the doctrine of election, and Hunsberger recalls presenting the paper to Newbigin and despite the fact that the paper had "lain unread in a stack of papers for probably the greater part of the fifty years since they were written, Newbigin expressed surprise that he had said so much at such an early date."[85] Hunsberger accurately notes the significance of this early paper but he simply misses one logical step in the argument presented, despite the obvious clue in the title. From its first articulation in Newbigin's theology the doctrine of election is expounded in the context of the doctrine of revelation. Thus from its inception in Newbigin's theology the doctrine of election was subservient to his

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[84] Hunsberger(1998):45
[85] Hunsberger(1998):57

doctrine of revelation. Within Newbigin's corpus of writing election is most often referred to whilst defending the divine economy in revealing Jesus to a specific people in a specific moment in space-time history. For example Newbigin often describes the problem in relating the particularity of the gospel in a Hindu context:

> "How can one believe that almighty God has hidden the secret of truth for all centuries from the great saints and scholars of India, the men and women who were composing some of the greatest religious literature in the world at a time when the tribes of western Europe were wild barbarians."[86]

Thus Newbigin most frequently expounds his doctrine of election in the context of explaining God's specificity in revelation. Election functions simply as the mechanism through which God reveals himself. This is not to argue that election is an arbitrary means of revelation; God's choice in using election is highly significant as reconciliation is the intended goal of divine revelation, but nevertheless election is subsidiary to the overall purpose of revelation.

Similarly Mike Goheen argues that it is Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology "that has been foundational for and formative of both his work within the ecumenical movement and his call for a missionary encounter with western culture."[87] This thesis will demonstrate that a missionary ecclesiology is a vital component of Newbigin's theological project but once again the mission of the church is subservient to God's intention to reveal himself. For Newbigin the church is the medium through which the gospel is most adequately revealed – as will be seen in his later writings Newbigin often used the term the "congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel"[88] and thus Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology must be seen as a facet of his doctrine of revelation. Thus this thesis contends that it is the doctrine of revelation that provides the more adequate gathering point in Newbigin's theological and missiological project and the point at

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[86] Newbigin(1989e):80
[87] Goheen(2000):6
[88] Newbigin(1989e):223

which to access the implicit theology of evangelism contained in Newbigin's wide and diverse body of work.

Newbigin's theological project remained consistent throughout his long and illustrious theological career. The 1936 essay "Revelation" was unintentionally programmatic as Newbigin's missiology consistently relates the themes of evangelism, ecclesiology and the doctrine of revelation. Despite the increasing sophistication in Newbigin's mature theology and the resources he found in the sociology of knowledge and the philosophy of science, Newbigin's central theological convictions remained constant.

The schema adopted to analyse Newbigin's doctrine of revelation and its implications for a theology of evangelism is the "three-cornered relationship"[89] that Newbigin uses to describe the missionary communication of the gospel; the corners being the target culture, the "church culture" of the missionary, and the gospel message.[90] For the purpose of this thesis Hunsberger's paraphrase and diagrammatic representation of these axes will be adopted. Hunsberger renames the axes: gospel, culture and church.[91] The way in which these three axes function within Newbigin's doctrine of revelation and the respective implications for a theology of evangelism will be explored in the three central chapters of this thesis.

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[89] Newbigin(1995h):147 also "triangular relationship" Newbigin(1978a):4
[90] Newbigin(1995h):147
[91] Hunsberger(1998):238

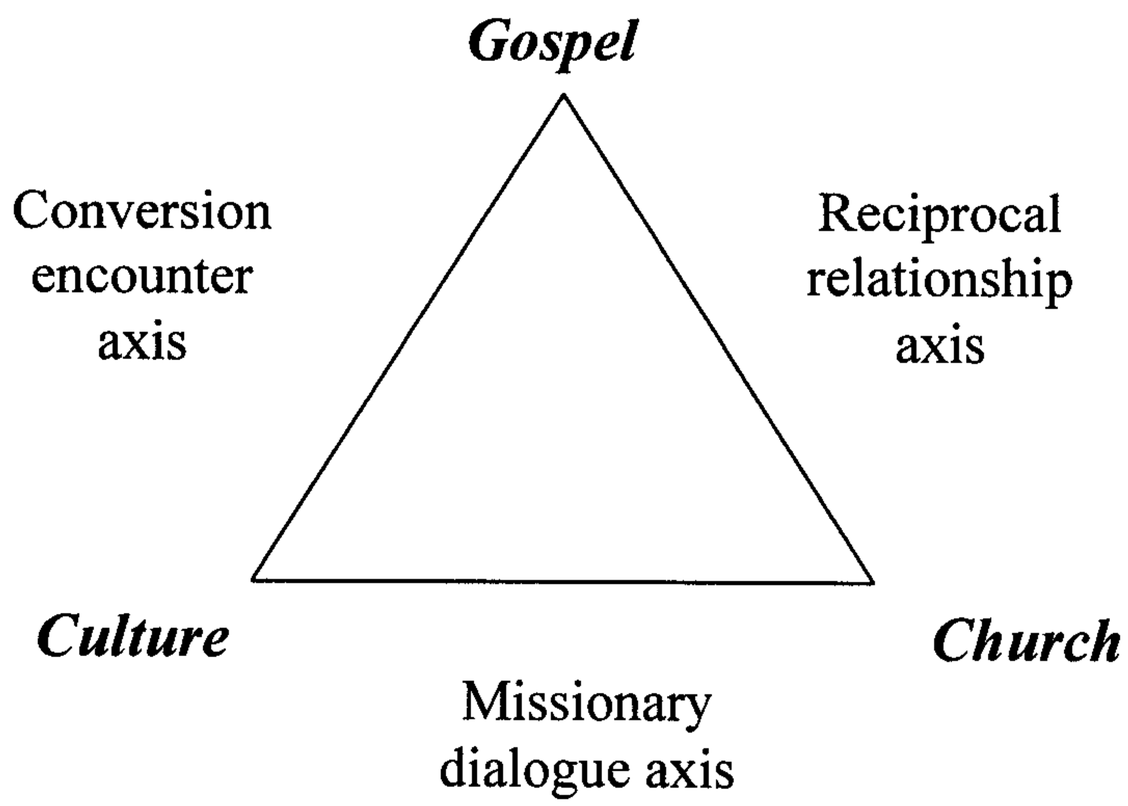


Figure 1: Newbigin's triangular model of missionary communication

An adapted form of this diagram will provide the overarching structure for this thesis as it provides a framework in which to examine the three most significant facets of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation. Chapter two will explore Newbigin's articulation of the gospel. Chapter three analyses Newbigin's theology of cultures with particular reference to the way in which cultures act as a source of revelation. Newbigin, along with most recent missiologists, is concerned that the gospel is effectively (re)contextualised, but his model of missionary communication assumes more than just repackaging or translating the gospel into new cultural contexts. The model asserts a dialogical relationship between gospel and culture, which assumes two-way communication. There is an implicit statement being made about the revelatory role of a culture if the gospel itself is affected by its cultural context. Newbigin's understanding of cultures must be examined and his articulation of the doctrines of common grace and general revelation will be particularly pertinent at this juncture. The plural "cultures" has been chosen against Hunsberger's singular use of "culture" as the title for this second corner of Newbigin's model of missionary communication. This is to emphasise Newbigin's awareness of "cultural plurality" and because, rather than looking at a specific case of missionary (re)contextualisation, this thesis seeks to provide a theological framework for the way in which God reveals himself through the interplay

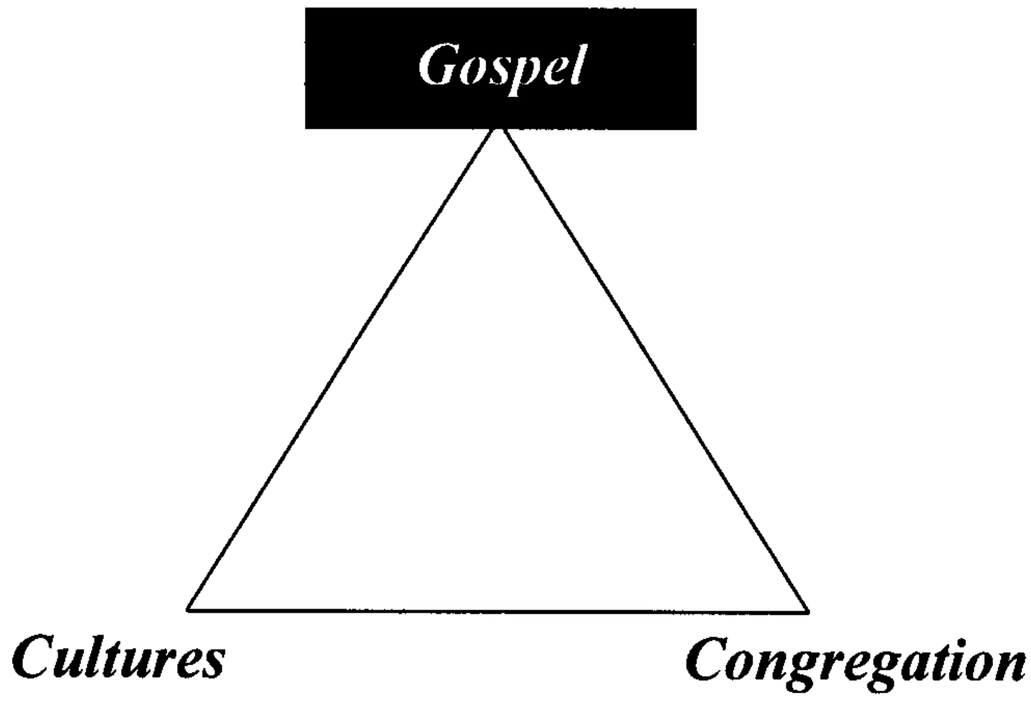
between gospel, cultures and congregations. Chapter four will explore the role of the congregation in Newbigin's doctrine of revelation. Although for Newbigin the third corner is the "ecumenical fellowship representing the witness of Christians from other cultures"[92] namely the church universal, it will be argued that it is more useful to consider the third corner the local congregation. Because this thesis is an attempt to provide a constructive and contextual theology of evangelism the implications of Newbigin's theology will be consistently applied to evangelism in late-modern contexts.

[92] Newbigin(1995h):153

Chapter 2

THE GOSPEL AS REVELATION

- the significance of Newbigin's understanding of the gospel



There are four good reasons to start an exploration of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation by looking at his articulation of the gospel. Firstly Newbigin himself gives the gospel primacy in his doctrine of revelation. Secondly any approach to evangelism is reliant on an understanding, implicit or explicit, of the gospel. Thus evangelism always assumes an evangel and an evangelist's conception of the gospel provides a window through which to explore their basic theological assumptions. Thirdly, the nature of the gospel has major implications for the way that it is communicated as the message either influences or is influenced by the methods by which it is communicated. Finally, and most significantly theologians have recently argued that the gospel provides the paradigm for understanding divine revelation. Snodgrass asserts that:

> "Revelation does not merely bring the gospel: the gospel *is* revelation."[93]

In a paper exploring Paul's exposition of the gospel in his Roman epistle, Snodgrass supports this statement with two arguments; firstly the gospel is to be understood as the central content of God's revelation:

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[93] Snodgrass(1994):314

> "the gospel is the description of a series of events in which God is revealed as God for us. The death and the resurrection of Jesus are the real disclosure of this God, and other revelations derive from this one." [94]

Secondly Snodgrass argues that through the preaching of the gospel a revelatory act is accomplished such that:

> "the preaching of the gospel represents God at work for us effecting salvation. The God revealing event of the death and resurrection is not abstract, but dynamic. As the revelation is narrated, God acts to show his love and saving fidelity."[95]

Referring to Snodgrass' work Peter Jensen, the Anglican Bishop of Sydney, Australia, argues forcefully that therefore the gospel should be viewed as the paradigm for understanding all revelation:

> "the gospel stands at the beginning of the story that explains why there are Christians at all, on the boundary between belief and unbelief."[96]

There is support for this position in Pauline theology as the reception of the gospel is consistently linked with the coming of belief such that the "god of the age" is described as "blinding the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."[97] The implication is that unbelievers are those who do not believe the gospel and therefore do not see the revelatory light of the gospel that displays the significance of Jesus. The gospel is described in Pauline language as "the revelation of the mystery,"[98] and the reception of the gospel is contemporaneous with coming to know God. It is too much to argue that failing to receive the gospel is failing to receive any revelation from God, but Paul does argue that the gospel is the most significant revelation of God so far, indeed "it is the power of God for salvation for both Jews and Gentiles"[99], the "revelation of righteousness from God"[100], and it is through the gospel

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[94] Snodgrass(1994):314
[95] Snodgrass(1994):314
[96] Jensen(2002):32
[97] 2 Corinthians4:4
[98] Romans16
[99] Romans1:16
[100] Romans1:17

that the church is constituted[101]. It is evident that the gospel is significant and, one can argue with Jensen, a paradigmatic form of revelation. To locate the central locus of God's revelation in the gospel rather than in Christ may seem unusual. Barth argues persistently that only the incarnate "Word" can properly be called divine revelation, or again, as Ward puts it, Christ's incarnation is the "central revelatory act of God."[102] But it must be asked how in this current phase of salvation history does one know the revelation of God in Christ? According to the New Testament the post-incarnation means of coming to know Christ is through the preaching of the gospel. Jensen argues that the "earliest Christians regarded [the gospel] as the power of God for salvation, the indispensable way to the knowledge of God. For them it was primary revelation, the initial and fundamental way into the presence of God".[103] Jensen's argument is convincing; Paul in his epistles uses the terms gospel and Christ interchangeably.[104] This is possible as the New Testament conception of the gospel, as will be demonstrated, is preaching the person of Christ but also the significance of his words, deeds and life. So a case can be made that there is no necessary distinction between centring revelation in the gospel or in Christ.

The gospel is a major concern in Newbigin's writing;[105] notably Newbigin's most significant project after returning from India was the initiative dubbed the 'Gospel and Culture movement.' In a sermon given at the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism in 1996, that Hunsberger describes as "the closing note of his prophetic message to us,"[106] Newbigin argues that missiologists often "use the word 'gospel' without giving as much attention as we need to the question of what exactly we mean by

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[101] Ephesians3:6
[102] Ward(1994):258
[103] Jensen(2002):43
[104] in Philippians 1:15,17 &18 Paul describes evangelism in terms of preaching "Christ" whereas in Romans 1:9 & 15 Paul talks of preaching "the gospel."
[105] Newbigin(1989e)
[106] Newbigin(2003):flyleaf

the word."[107] This lack of reflection on the content of the gospel has serious consequences for the way the gospel is communicated. Indeed the American missiologist Darrell L. Guder has noted:

> "Every judgement we will make about the methodologies of evangelism will depend upon our answer to the questions: What is the gospel? What is the fullness of the apostolic message? What is salvation? What does the church's gospel mission intend? What is the Missio Dei… that defines the identity, purpose, and way of life of the church?"[108]

Newbigin has a multifaceted understanding of the gospel which provides a hermeneutical key to his doctrine of revelation. This chapter will explore the interrelated themes of Newbigin's understanding of the gospel as revelation and the resources provided for constructing a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures.

Newbigin's 1942 booklet "What is the Gospel?"[109] provides a useful point of departure to explore his understanding of the gospel. The booklet is helpful for two reasons, firstly it is Newbigin's only work that is specifically dedicated to exploring the nature of the content of the gospel and secondly it provides a very early exposition of Newbigin's understanding of the gospel and thus there is ample opportunity to track continuity and discontinuity in Newbigin's theological development. The pamphlet was written in India for the SCM, consisting of a series of student Bible studies expounding the gospel using what Newbigin describes as the gospel's "first recorded proclamation… Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost Acts 2:22-36 (excluding the apologetic section.)"[110] Newbigin uses Peter's sermon as the exegetical outline to form the six studies:

- Implied views as to the nature of God
- A statement about the well known facts of the life of Jesus (verse 22)
- A statement about his death (verse 23)
- A statement about his resurrection (verses 25-32)

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[107] Newbigin(2003):113
[108] Guder(1994):148
[109] although the booklet does not bear the author's name, Newbigin himself claims authorship in his biography see discussion in Wainright(2000):62-65
[110] Newbigin(1942):3

- A statement about who Jesus is (verses 34-36)
- A statement about the new powers that follow (verse 33)

Each of Newbigin's points will be explored: the first will be examined under the rubric of Newbigin's understanding of the gospel as historical revelation, the second, third and fifth are particularly germane to the first section on Newbigin's christocentrism, the fourth will be examined under the heading 'the gospel as incommensurable revelation' and the sixth under the section on the gospel as eschatological revelation. Before entering into the detail of Newbigin's exposition of Peter's Pentecost sermon, it is worth noting some of the assumptions demonstrated by Newbigin's decision to base his exposition of the gospel on this sermon. Newbigin's attempt to construct a generalised gospel presentation from a specific gospel sermon is reminiscent of C.H.Dodd's analysis of Peter's first four speeches in Acts in "The Apostolic Preaching and its Development."[111] Dodd proposes a more or less fixed kerygma comprising of the following six points:

1. "the age of fulfilment has dawned"[112]
2. "this has taken place through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus."[113]
3. "by virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted to God's right hand, as Messianic head of the new Israel."[114]
4. "the Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory."[115]
5. "the Messianic Age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ."[116]
6. "an appeal for repentance and the offer of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, and the promise of salvation - the life of the age to come to those who enter the community."[117]

Interestingly, although there is some overlap between Dodd and Newbigin's accounts of the gospel there is divergence at significant points. Newbigin's formulation shows less emphasis on the Jewish context of Jesus; this is surprising as Newbigin is expounding a sermon preached to a predominantly Jewish audience at a significant Jewish feast

[111] Dodd(1936)
[112] Dodd(1936):38
[113] Dodd(1936):39
[114] Dodd(1936):41
[115] Dodd(1936):42
[116] Dodd(1936):42
[117] Dodd(1936):43

whereas Dodd's analysis of apostolic preaching includes many sermons written to gentile audiences. Indeed in Newbigin's exposition there is only passing mention given to Jesus as the Messiah, in a passage that highlights the fact that Jesus "did not wish to be proclaimed as Messiah during his life on earth, but to be recognised as such by each man's faith."[118] There is also no mention of the original context of Peter's sermon. The title "What is the Gospel?" indicates that Newbigin was seeking to outline a definitive presentation of the gospel yet he deliberately isolates the conclusion of Peter's sermon from its beginning choosing to exclude what he describes as "the apologetic section." This appears to be an attempt to de-contextualise Peter's sermon from its Jewish setting. Newbigin's outline is susceptible to the same criticism that Dodd's work has faced; that those who have sought to distil the apostolic gospel down to a fixed number of propositions come up with both a different number and indeed radically different propositions.[119] Michael Green argues that the variety of situations that the gospel was preached informed the evangelists, such that in the words of H.J.Cadbury, the apostolic preaching of the gospel never was "static or monolithic."[120] This contextual awareness is greatly developed by Newbigin in his later writing,[121] most likely due to the influence of his long-term cross-cultural evangelistic work and his own reverse cross-cultural experience. Indeed Newbigin's effort to (re)contextualise the gospel for the western world became arguably his most enduring work.

2.1 The gospel is Christocentric revelation

It is essential to Newbigin's understanding of the gospel that it centres on the person of Jesus. Newbigin has been described as Christocentric[122] and with just cause as Newbigin summarises his own approach to the preaching ministry as: "we have to

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[118] Newbigin(1942):14
[119] Michael Green notes that A.M. Hunter and C.T. Craig argued for a three-point gospel outline – unfortunately both had different points, F. Filson and T.F.Glasson both had a five point outline but again these were different. See Green(1970):71
[120] Green(1970):74
[121] Newbigin(1989e)
[122] Goheen(2000):163

preach Christ. That is really our only business in the pulpit."[123] But Newbigin's Christocentrism is informed by his desire to be faithful to the apostolic proclamation of the gospel. The apostle Paul can say that he knew nothing whilst he was among the Corinthian church "but Christ and him crucified."[124] Newbigin is fully aware of the need for a fully orbed and expounded Trinitarian theology. Newbigin writes that the doctrine of the Trinity "has usually been regarded as a venerable formulation handed down from the past, or perhaps… a troublesome piece of theological baggage which is best kept out of sight."[125] His short book "Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission"[126] was a clarion call to the missionary arm of the ecumenical movement to rediscover the riches of Trinitarianism and served as the underpinning of all Newbigin's later Trinitarian missiological reflection.[127] Yet for all of his insistence on the importance of the Trinity, there was no sense of contradiction in Newbigin's Christological focus. Newbigin is following the model of the New Testament writers as they were operating with a Trinitarian consciousness and yet a Christological focus. When Newbigin explains the person of Christ he argues that Jesus was sent by the Father to be the sin-bearer and that after his resurrection he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit to all who believe in him, proving a Trinitarian substructure to his gospel exposition.

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[123] Newbigin(1974c):24
[124] 1 Corinthians2:2
[125] Newbigin(1963):35
[126] Newbigin(1963)
[127] see later discussion of the development of Trinitarian thinking in Newbigin's work following the "Household of God."

2.1a The gospel: a statement about the well-known facts of the life of Jesus

Newbigin subdivides the section of his Bible study guide devoted to the person of Christ into the following areas:

- Jesus and the kingdom of God
- Jesus' character and humility
- Jesus and Peter, the twelve and the needy

Jesus and the kingdom of God

Newbigin argues that with the coming of Jesus "the long promised Reign of God has begun."[128] This understanding of the significance of Jesus persists throughout Newbigin's writing such that thirty years later Newbigin can still summarise the gospel as the fact that: "God's reign has come into the world in the coming of Jesus. That is the good news."[129] The eschatological significance of the coming kingdom is not spelled out in Newbigin's 1942 exposition but, as will be explored in a later section, this is highly significant to Newbigin's more mature theology of evangelism.

Jesus' character and humility

Newbigin writes: "to have grasped fully in one field of vision the authority and self-abasement of Jesus is to have grasped the Gospel."[130] The need to know the character of Christ is significant as it hints at the need for personal engagement with the person of Christ rather than theoretical knowledge about him. Newbigin describes the Hebrew conception of the verb to know:

> "the central use of the verb 'to know' in the Old Testament is its use in respect of the mutual knowledge of persons. It expresses a relationship in which much more is involved than the knowledge of facts, of concepts, or of mathematical or logical operations."[131]

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[128] Newbigin(1942):6
[129] Newbigin(1974c):65
[130] Newbigin(1942):7
[131] Newbigin(1966a):79 Newbigin went on to spell this out in a lecture series presented at Holy Trinity Brompton drawing on the distinction present in many languages between knowledge of something (Connaitre) and knowledge of someone (Savoir). Newbigin (1995b)

This is a recurrent theme in Newbigin's writings as he continually makes reference to Martin Buber's work "Ich und Du". Buber was a Jewish philosopher whose dialectical philosophy was most appreciated ironically by Protestant theologians.[132] Wainwright contends that Newbigin was exposed to Buber's work through Eric Fenn's little book "Things and Persons"[133] which was published in 1931, eight years after "Ich und Du," but six years before its first English translation.[134] (Newbigin also engaged in a personal correspondence with Fenn)[135]. Wainwright quotes a conversation he had with Newbigin over the influence of Fenn's use of Buber where the work "was quite decisive for the argument with scientific determinism, which up to then had seemed to present impassable barriers."[136] Newbigin explains the significance that Buber's work had on his own conversion stating "as for me and (I suspect) many in my generation, one of the crucial insights that made it possible to come to Christian faith was that of Buber in his book 'I and Thou'."[137]

The influence of Buber, initially via Fenn, may well be the reason that Newbigin finds such compatibility with the ideas of the Hungarian philosopher of science Michael Polanyi whose work was used extensively by Newbigin. Indeed there is evidence that Buber is the link between Polanyi and Newbigin. Polanyi quotes Buber's work, but without acknowledging his source: there is not a single reference to Buber's work in the footnotes nor in the index of Polanyi's *magnum opus* "Personal Knowledge"[138](PK), yet there is an unmistakable reference. In the context of explaining the existence of logical levels where "a science dealing with living person appears logically different from a

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[132] Kaufman(1970):20
[133] Fenn(1931)
[134] Wainwright(2000):20
[135] Newbigin(1989e):226
[136] Wainwright(2000):21 Newbigin entered into personal correspondence with Fenn in 1937 Newbigin(1989e):226
[137] Newbigin(1995i):59-60
[138] Polanyi(1962)

science dealing with inanimate things"[139] such that sociology cannot be explained in purely biological terms, without severe reductionism, Polanyi argues that a person cannot be viewed purely as an object but they must be seen as subject too because "another person can judge us just as we judge him, and his judgement may affect our judgement of ourselves."[140] In other words, when it comes to evaluating another person mutuality prevails to such an extent

> "that the logical category of an observer facing an object placed on a lower logical level becomes altogether inapplicable. The I-It situation has gradually been transformed into the I-Thou relationship."[141]

Thus Buber may be the intellectual bridge point between Newbigin and Polanyi's work and the reason why Polanyi became so compatible with Newbigin's own theology project. The relationship between Newbigin's theology and Polanyi's epistemology will be explored under the rubric of the gospel as incommensurable revelation.

Buber's most often quoted insight is the now well-known distinction between "I-Thou" knowledge and "I-It" knowledge. In Newbigin's reading of Buber the "I-It" relationship is based around the exercise of autonomous reason. An "I-Thou" relationship involves one person encountering another equal involving listening and responding to another subject. As Newbigin puts it: "the knowledge of another person becomes available to me if I will trust the other person as a free subject, listen to that person, answer the questions he or she puts to me, allow myself to be challenged, in other words abandon the role of sovereign autonomy."[142] Thus Newbigin argues that revelation is the only means by which we come to know another person. Newbigin uses the I-Thou construction to argue that God is known in the same way that we know any person

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[139] Polanyi(1962):344
[140] Polanyi(1962):346
[141] Polanyi(1962):346
[142] Newbigin(1989e):60 compare this with "We cannot even understand another unless he chooses, unless he gives himself to our knowing." in Fenn(1931):29

through revelation. Kaufman comments that both in the original German and in its English translation of Buber's work the "I-Thou" or "Ich-Sein" distinction is usually reserved for addressing God. Thus Buber's argument appears to be that the analogy of our knowledge of human beings is based on our knowledge of God, as God's self-revelation is the paradigm for understanding all other personal beings. Ironically Buber's approach has a greater affinity with Barthian theology than Newbigin's. Newbigin writes that :

> "[t]he knowledge of an object is achieved by processes of inspection and experiment in which the knowing subject is the only active agent. Knowledge of another person involves the recognition of another centre of decision which it is not in my power to control… This is a self-revelation which the other can, if he will, finally withhold. I may even use torture and the threat of death to extract from another some secret about himself, but he can still withhold from me that trust of the knowledge of another person."[143]

This emphasis anticipates Newbigin's argument that the gospel is essentially a narrative as he contends that character is best communicated through narrative. At this stage in the discussion it is worth noting that Newbigin seeks to flesh out the character of Christ, rather than simply present a functional Christology where Christ is seen as sin-bearer or prophetic fulfilment; this hints at Newbigin's emphasis on conversion as a giving of allegiance to the person of Christ and the believer's fellowship with him. Newbigin comments "the study has born its fruit when 'the Gospel' is also 'my Gospel.'"[144] This emphasis is a departure from Dodd's kerygmatic reductionism and a counter-balance to Newbigin's solely propositional gospel outline.

Jesus and Peter, the twelve and the needy

Newbigin's 1942 gospel outline includes reference to Jesus' relationships as for Newbigin Jesus' character is also demonstrated by the intimacy in which he interacts with Peter, the twelve apostles and the needy. Newbigin cannot help but point students

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[143] Newbigin(1966a):86
[144] Newbigin(1942):3

to stories about Jesus that reveal his character. Newbigin is adamant that "[o]nce in this world perfect love happened… it is a vital part of the gospel story."[145] Jesus' loving relationships are a vital part of the gospel for Newbigin, due not only to his interest in historical felicity but also due to his theological investment in the doctrine of election. God creates fellowship with himself through evangelism. There is a deliberate intention that the gospel must be communicated through people as God's dual purpose is reconciliation not just with himself but also between people. This will be seen in the exploration of the gospel as communal revelation.

2.1b The gospel: a statement about the death of Christ

The inordinate attention gospel writers give to Christ's death demonstrates that the crucifixion is to be understood not as a miscarriage of justice or a political murder but as the fulfilment of Christ's mission.[146] Newbigin affirms that the fact of Jesus' death "has always occupied a central place in the gospel"[147] and he subdivides his treatment of the atonement into three areas: judgement on our world, God's love in action and a once and for all sacrifice.

Christ's death: a judgment on our world

Newbigin argues that the crucifixion of Jesus demonstrates that

> "[h]uman nature is a treasonable and murderous conspiracy against God. Whatever goodness we may achieve relative to others, we remain nevertheless in this dire position, sinners against God."[148]

Newbigin's exposition of the cross starts with an explanation of how it reveals the true state of humanity and the rightful wrath of God. This approach to the cross was

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[145] Newbigin(1942):9
[146] John Stott notes the triple repetition of Jesus' crucifixion prediction in Mark8:31-32, 9:31, 10:32-35. Stott(1990):26-27
[147] Newbigin(1942):9
[148] Newbigin(1942):9

consistent throughout Newbigin's theological career[149]. In later treatments of the atonement Newbigin consistently describes the cross as a revelation of humanity's sinfulness, for example in a passage in which Newbigin sought to debunk human objectivity he writes:

> "We are not honest inquirers seeking the truth. We are alienated from the truth and enemies of it.. This was demonstrated when the truth became incarnate… when our response… a response including all the representatives of the best of human culture at that time and place, was to seek and destroy it."[150]

Newbigin goes on to argue that human sinfulness "is the terrible reality that the liberal typically fails to recognise,"[151] but that the crucifixion only makes sense if it is God's response to sinful humanity. Newbigin links the fact that the cross reveals the universal sinfulness of humanity with the necessity of humility in evangelism. "The confession of the truth will be part of a continual indebtedness to grace."[152] Because our ability to know the truth of the gospel is not due to personal intelligence, the evangelist argues that his ability to know truth has been warped by sin and therefore "the witness that Christians bear to the truth must be a humble and penitent witness."[153] This is an important application as in the late-modern context evangelism is politically incorrect due to the charge of arrogance of claiming to know the truth in the area of religion. However, if the gospel reveals that all have sinned then the charge is refuted, as evangelists do not claim superiority over the evangelized, but stand alongside their listeners equally convicted.

Christ's death: God's love in action

> "The cross is a judgement, and also a revelation of love, and it is the one because it is the other. In the cross we see the self-abasement of Jesus carried to the uttermost… God against whom we sin, and who punishes sinners, at the same

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[149] Newbigin(1961b):70 "no one can stand before the cross of Christ … and not know that he and all men are thereby brought under judgement."
[150] Newbigin(1995i):69
[151] Newbigin(1995i):69
[152] Newbigin(1995i):69
[153] Newbigin(1995i):70

> time loves them enough to share the punishment and endure the wrath? That is what the cross means..."[154]

Newbigin is not arguing that the cross is simply a revelation and not effectual action, but that the effectual action has enormous revelatory significance. For Newbigin the cross is both a revelation of God's judgement and God's love, because on the cross Christ was acting as a penal substitute. Newbigin's self-proclaimed evangelical stance on the atonement after his conversion is evidenced here, as the penal substitution model is the dominant, but not solitary model[155], of the atonement in evangelical theology. This is again interesting considering Peter's Pentecost sermon does not explore the death of Christ in terms of penal substitution. Peter's emphasis on Christ's death relates more to the guilt due to complicity of the Jewish audience in the death of the Messiah despite his accreditation by works of miracles. The resurrection over the great enemy death is the greater emphasis but which seems to support the *Christus Victor* model of the atonement, re-popularised in the twentieth century by Gustav Aulen[156], rather than penal substitution.

Christ's death: Once and for all

> "A note of crisis, with the implied demand for immediate decision, runs through this as through all proclamations of the Gospel… accept or reject it! This is the message to every man of whatever nation, or language, or culture."[157]

Newbigin moves from the fact of the cross to the finality of Christ, leading directly to two interrelated themes addressed later in this chapter: the gospel as particular and salvific revelation. At this point Newbigin's conception of the gospel finds its most vociferous opponents as it cuts against the central tenet of ideological pluralism. But this emphasis in Newbigin continues throughout his works and leads to an affirmation of another part of the evangelical quadrilateral; the commitment to conversion. But it

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[154] Newbigin(1942):10
[155] Gunton(1988)
[156] McGrath(1997):397
[157] Newbigin(1942):10-11

remains a consistent theme that the once-and-for-all nature of the atonement drives Newbigin's evangelistic intentions. "We have a message for the whole human race because in Christ, and in him once and for all, the total rebellion of the human race against its maker is unmasked, judged and forgiven."[158]

After exploring the implications of Christ's death, Newbigin naturally goes on to examine the resurrection as the two are evangelistically inseparable. However for the sake of theological reflection Newbigin's approach to the resurrection will be examined in the subsequent section 'the gospel as incommensurable revelation.'

2.1c Jesus: paradigm of special revelation

For Newbigin the incarnate Christ is the central moment of God's revelation to humanity. Newbigin writes: "there has been a decisive and complete revelation of God in the particular event of Jesus' earthly ministry."[159] As has been shown there are good grounds to argue that the gospel should be seen as the paradigmatic example of revelation and thus the person and work of Christ must be given centrality in any doctrine of revelation. Colin Gunton argues: "when we speak of revelation, we are speaking first of all of Jesus Christ, who thus forms the focus of all that we have to say."[160] Three aspects of Newbigin's commitment to the centrality of Christ are germane to this study: Jesus as the clue to the Bible, Jesus as the clue to universal history and the centrality of the death and resurrection of Jesus for history.

Despite Newbigin's 1942 gospel presentation appearing to de-contextualise the gospel from its Jewish situation, Newbigin's mature theological articulation of the gospel

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[158] Newbigin(1961b):71
[159] Newbigin(1989e):78
[160] Gunton(1995):125

locates the revelation of Christ within the wider context of God's election of the nation of Israel.[161]

> "the reading of the Bible involves a twofold movement: we have to understand Jesus in the context of the whole story, and we have to understand the whole story in the light of Jesus."[162]

Newbigin argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between the revelations in Christ and the first testament: such that Jesus is understood in the light of the Old Testament which is in turn understood in the light of Christ. The fact that Christ explained himself with reference to Old Testament scripture is significant as it means that it is not only the temporal distance between the historical events of Christ's earthly existence and contemporary life that dictate the need for the mediation of scripture to reveal Christ. Even during the incarnation when Christ was immediately present the Old Testament scriptures mediated Christ's revelation to those that witnessed his earthly life. The scriptures provided the categories, types and antitypes that Christ used to communicate whilst in human flesh. Thus there is a theological rather than chronological need for scripture to mediate God's revelation in Christ to humanity. It is worth noting that the preparation the Old Testament provides to understanding Christ's coming can be understood through a Polanyian framework, although interestingly Newbigin does not attempt this in his writings. The Old Testament provides the interpretive framework through which the incarnation can properly be understood. There is a sense in which the Old Testament provides the tutelage to a tradition that enables someone to tacitly approach the person of Christ, as it provides the context in which the significance of Jesus' actions and claims can be grasped. Thus there is an inseparable link between canon and Christ in the doctrine of special revelation. Equally it is worth stating at this juncture that the canon is inseparably connected to community, which will be explored

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[161] Newbigin(1989e):63
[162] Newbigin(1995i):88

in the third section of this study of special revelation, but because of their interrelatedness these themes continually impinge on one another.

Christocentrism is often used as a derogatory term to criticise theological positions and Newbigin has been criticised for having an overly Christocentric theology and an underdeveloped Trinitarianism. This is harsh as Newbigin consciously sought to engage in Trinitarian missiology. Michael Goheen in his thesis on Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology argues that Newbigin has a "Christocentric focus and a Trinitarian breadth."[163] This accurately represents Newbigin's position. Included in the six points of Newbigin's 1942 articulation of the gospel is "A testimony to the powers of the age to come" which centres on the promise of the Holy Spirit. Newbigin also is keen to identify Jesus as God's Son and Messiah and locate him as the sacrifice to propitiate the father's wrath and as the agent that brings the foretaste of the coming kingdom of God.

2.1d Implications

Newbigin's gospel is Christocentric within a wider Trinitarian framework. It centres on the death and resurrection of Christ, demonstrating both God's wrath and grace. Newbigin challenges evangelists in late-modern contexts to be faithful to the central core of the gospel despite its political incorrectness. For late-modern cultures the implications of Newbigin's christocentic gospel are to present the gospel as centring on Christ, the need to present the gospel within the whole sweep of salvation history and to present Christ in his totality.

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[163] Goheen(2001):163 somewhat confusingly argues that this is both the strength and the weakness of Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology.

Evangelism involves presenting a person rather than a philosophy

Newbigin, following the example of the apostles, focuses on the person of Christ in his gospel message. Often evangelism has been the presentation of superior apologetic frameworks, philosophical arguments or "Christian lifestyle" (read western cultural values). Newbigin draws evangelism back to its centre, the person and work of Christ. God seeks relationship with his people a relationship brought about through God's self-revelation. God reveals himself supremely not in abstract concepts but in the historical-life narrative of his incarnate son. Newbigin rightly seeks to portray not a functional approach to Christology where Christ is simply presented as sin bearer, but a richer, warmer fully-orbed presentation of the revelation of God's personality in the incarnation. Thus the theologically significant events of Christ's life form a vital part of Newbigin's gospel set within the context of Christ's personality.

The evangel needs contextualisation within (salvation) history

Newbigin uses the person of Christ as the means to make sense of the whole of scripture and, as will be shown, the whole of human history. This is significant as Christ must be understood within the context of the whole of scripture. It encourages evangelism in late-modern contexts to follow the example of the apostle Paul who sought to preach "the whole will of God."[164] This would include preaching both the Old and New Testaments. In an increasingly post-Christian western context, biblical illiteracy is on the increase and the sweep of salvation history is less well-known. But the large-scale narrative of the scriptures provides the best context for the significance of Christ to be encountered. Often evangelism has succumbed to the spirit of the age, (the emphasis on the sound-bite and the headline) however there is a need to present Christ within the context of the whole of scripture. This point will be examined in the context of the relationship between gospel and culture in a later chapter, but here it is worth noting that

[164] Acts 20:27

Newbigin's strongly orthodox approach in locating Christ as the centre of the scripture's message points to the significance of the whole of scripture's witness to Christ.

The gospel must present Christ in his totality

Newbigin addressing an assembly of preachers stated: "To preach Christ means to preach him as Saviour and as Lord."[165] Newbigin outlines two types of preaching – "the typically evangelical type which lays the whole stress on the fact that Christ is the Saviour, the one who helps, delivers and comforts us,"[166] which he challenges as a therapeutic representation of Christ and a deformed gospel. Secondly Newbigin challenges another kind of preaching that "simply sends people out of church with an unbearable bad conscience."[167] This type Newbigin describes as "the preaching of the law without the gospel."[168] Newbigin charges preachers to preach Christ as

> "both saviour and Lord, both as the one who delivers me totally from guilt, from fear, from anxiety, from all terror of the future; and as the one that calls me in total obedience, calls me to take up the cross and follow him through the world."[169]

2.2 The gospel is incommensurable revelation

The death of Christ is inseparable from the resurrection. In Newbigin's work the resurrection is more than just another event in Christ's mission, it has a huge epistemological significance.

2.2a The gospel: a statement about Christ's resurrection

In what Newbigin describes as the closest he comes to a systematic theology, he writes that the death and resurrection of Jesus is "the turning point of history."[170] In a similar vein Newbigin argues that the resurrection of Jesus is:

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[165] Newbigin(1979a)
[166] Newbigin(1979a)
[167] Newbigin(1979a)
[168] Newbigin(1979a)
[169] Newbigin(1979a)
[170] Newbigin(1990g):4

> "a boundary of human knowledge… It is possible to remain domesticated in the old order, where 'God' is so defined that he cannot do what the gospel says he has done… Certainly the resurrection makes no sense if one starts from there. The point is that if you start with the resurrection... you can begin to make sense this (otherwise) meaningless world of sin and death."[171]

Newbigin's approach to Christ's resurrection is sophisticated. There are two themes that are worth exploring for their implications for Newbigin's theology of evangelism: firstly and briefly the eschatological significance of the resurrection and secondly and more extensively the epistemological implications of the resurrection.

The eschatological significance of the resurrection

> "[I]n raising his beloved son from the dead, God has given the pledge and the foretaste of his unconquerable grace in kindness and patience toward the world which rejects him… But God in his patient and long-suffering love sustains the created world, and the world of human culture, in order that there may still be time and space for repentance and for the coming into being of the new creation within the womb of old."[172]

The resurrection in the New Testament functions as a landmark event in salvation history and the point at which the eschatological new age enters history. This broader theological framework is significant as for many evangelical apologists the resurrection is simply seen as the ultimate miraculous proof of the divinity of Christ. This use of the resurrection[173] has biblical precedent but does not exhaust its significance or usefulness in evangelism. This approach continues the tendency to individualise the gospel as the resurrection is taken out of its salvation-history context. Newbigin explains that the resurrection marks the beginning of the final destiny of all humanity and the start of the new creation.

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[171] Newbigin(1990g):4
[172] Newbigin(1989e):194
[173] Romans1:4 & 1 Corinthians 15:16-21

The epistemological significance of the resurrection

Newbigin's apologetic method does not rely on the historical evidences for the resurrection that are common among evangelical apologists[174], although, as will be shown, Newbigin is vociferous in his defence of the historicity of the gospel accounts in general and the resurrection in particular. Newbigin is aware of the late-modern developments in epistemology that emphasise the perspectival nature of knowing and the effect that interpretive frameworks have on an individual's ability to find an event plausible or not. Newbigin also has a grasp of some of the key elements of historiography that reject the naïve realism that many accounts of the historical evidences for the resurrection assume. Newbigin is of course heavily influenced by Michael Polanyi's epistemology.[175] Polanyi provides Newbigin with philosophical resources for developing a non-foundationalist epistemology that he adapts for his own apologetic and evangelistic purposes. Polanyi criticised the methodology and ontology operative in the scientific community, particularly the naïve empiricism that sought to move from objective observation to generalised theory. Polanyi argued that instead science operates through the use of interpretive frameworks that determine what a scientist recognises as a significant observation, otherwise known the "theory-dependence of observation."[176] This insight is utilised by many late-modern thinkers to argue against the notion of absolute truth due to the perspectival nature of all knowing. Newbigin is well aware of this approach and notes that the resurrection will not fit into any interpretive framework other than one within which it provides a starting point[177]. This is labelled by some as epistemological fideism[178] which is described as putting faith in faith, or simply encouraging blind faith. Newbigin's approach to the resurrection is an important test-case for his epistemological approach.

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[174] Moreland(1993),Geisler(1993) & McDowell(1990)
[175] Weston(2001):79 describes Polanyi as the "key to Newbigin's thought."
[176] Chalmers(1992):20-37
[177] Newbigin(1990g):4 and (1985a):32
[178] Abraham(2003):34 who draws parallels between Bishop John Spong and Newbigin's fideism

Newbigin argues that apologists often unwittingly acquiesce to the assumptions of those to whom they are seeking to commend the gospel.[179] Newbigin has in mind the rationalistic foundationalists who seek to provide logical proofs for the existence of God. Sometimes Newbigin labels all attempts at "apologetics" as seeking to "demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity."[180] Newbigin points out that this has a naïve approach to rationality as it assumes a universal standard of reasonableness or plausibility. Newbigin refuses to submit the gospel to any apparent external universal rational set of criteria but this does not necessarily lead him to fideism. In fact the charge of fideism is unjustified as Newbigin argues consistently for the historical veracity of the resurrection event. Newbigin is at great pains to argue against the mythological approach exemplified by Rudolf Bultman. Indeed Bultman is a perfect example of Newbigin's warning of what happens if another starting point for knowledge apart from the resurrection is used, namely a domestication of the resurrection. The possibility of the actuality of the resurrection undermines Bultman's interpretive framework and so he has to demythologise the resurrection and provide a way of disregarding the gospel writer's claims to historicity. Newbigin argues, with deliberate reference to Bultman's work, that

> "it is no more and no less difficult to believe in the resurrection after the invention of the light bulb than before… It has never at any time been possible to fit the resurrection of Jesus into any worldview except the worldview of which it is the basis."[181]

Newbigin argues that the resurrection must provide the starting point for its own interpretive framework as the resurrection is the paradigm for understanding divine revelation. It is in this sense that the gospel is incommensurable, although Newbigin does not use this term. The gospel cannot be compared or evaluated by another system or an "objective" observer. The title of one of Newbigin's key texts on relating gospel

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[179] Newbigin(1989e):3
[180] Newbigin(1995i):93
[181] Newbigin(1966a):52

and culture is telling: "Foolishness to the Greeks."[182] This title draws from Paul's first Corinthian epistle[183], where the gospel is described as a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Greek-speaking gentiles. This verse summarises Newbigin's approach to the relationship between gospel and culture. The gospel will appear as foolishness when evaluated from the standpoint of any other set of presuppositions; it is only as it is believed that the gospel makes sense. Thus Newbigin's approach is to argue that the gospel in general and the resurrection in particular provides the framework through which every other claim to truth must be interpreted. This is not fideistic, but rather an antifoundational approach to knowledge. Newbigin asks with strong echoes of Barthianism:

> "what are the grounds on which I should choose to follow [Christ] rather than any of the others who have made similar claims? We cannot answer that by offering some grounds, something supposedly more reliable than what is given to us in Christ. To do so would be to embark on an infinite regress."[184]

Newbigin rejects the usual solution to the problem of infinite regress which is to propose a foundational epistemology. If beliefs rest on other beliefs, foundationalists argue, there must be some beliefs that are held as foundational, as true either in themselves or as self-evidently true to human reason. Newbigin rejects foundationalism as his cross-cultural experience made the notion of a universal disembodied reason implausible. For Newbigin reason "is not an independent source of information as to what is the case."[185] Newbigin is confident that there are no such rational foundations and so he deconstructs the request for reliable grounds for accepting the gospel message by stating:

> "what is really being asked, of course, is that we should show that the gospel is in accordance with the reigning plausibility structure of our society, that it

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[182] Newbigin(1986c)
[183] 1Corinthians 1:23
[184] Newbigin(1991g):28
[185] Newbigin(1989e):53

> accords with the assumptions which we normally do not doubt; and that is exactly what we cannot and must not do."[186]

Newbigin argues that justificatory foundations for the gospel that are outside of the gospel cannot be given as he, along with the reformed apologists, rejects the idea of a "neutral standpoint."[187] There is no Archimedean point outside of cultures to provide an objective evaluation of the gospel. The doctrines of the noetic effects of sin and the sovereignty of God provide theological support for challenging the idea of a neutral evaluation point. The sovereignty of God emphasises God's supremacy and therefore seeking an independent and more reliable source of information than God himself implies idolatry[188]. The noetic effects of sin emphasises that human knowing and thinking, as well as behaviour, have been infected by sin and therefore there is no such thing as pure reason. Thus when the gospel is made to conform to reason it is actually conformed to culturally-influenced norms and presuppositions. Newbigin argues that in fact if the gospel is made to conform to these norms it ceases to be the gospel.[189] Newbigin applies this to the area of natural theology which will be examined in full under the rubric of the gospel and cultures but it is worth noting here that Newbigin sees natural theology as "no service to faith but a subversion of it" as it seeks to offer grounds of assurance "more reliable than God's own self revelation"[190]

At first glance Newbigin's argument that the gospel needs to be the starting point for its own interpretive framework seems to be foundationalistic but his use of the term 'interpretive framework' evidences his commitment to a coherentist epistemology where a belief is justified if it is able to add comprehensiveness, consistency and cohesion to the web of beliefs currently held. D.L. Wolfe gives useful shorthand for coherentist epistemological criteria:

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[186] Newbigin(1989e):28
[187] Newbigin(1996b):19
[188] Newbigin(1996b):23
[189] Newbigin(1996b):16
[190] Newbigin(1996b):20

- Consistency -no contradictions within the interpretive scheme
- Coherence -internal relatedness within the interpretive scheme
- Comprehensiveness -applicability of the interpretive scheme to all experience
- Congruity -appropriateness of the scheme to the experience it covers[191]

According to Newbigin, the gospel is the means through which humans tacitly, to use Polanyi's term, approach the world. Thus Newbigin's apologetic approach is to argue for the historical veracity of the resurrection but ask that it be believed and used as the heuristic device to explore the world. The gospel is then judged by its winsomeness, coherence and consistency in explaining the world around us. This apologetic approach is directly linked to the emphasis in Newbigin's theology on narrative that will be explored later. It will also be necessary to try and account for Newbigin's insistence on the historicity of the resurrection narrative and how this can be squared with a coherentist epistemology.

2.2b Implications

Newbigin's approach to the resurrection challenges evangelism in a late-modern context to avoid a syncretistic relationship with any methods of justification of knowledge that would result in compromising the gospel message. Newbigin's epistemology seeks to be faithful to scripture and particularly to the experience of conversion as a radical reorientation of interpretive framework that takes place by coming to faith in the gospel. Newbigin's approach is in many ways more plausible in a late-modern context than a modern one.

Under modernity there was confidence in empiricism and rationalism such that all modes of thinking that failed to conform to their supposedly objective standards could be easily dismissed as myth and fable, leading to a tendency to demythologise the supernatural parts of the gospel. However, the naivety of this approach has been

[191] Wolfe(1982):55

exposed as the measuring standards of Enlightenment rationalism have themselves been brought into question. When this fact is coupled with the influence of the sociology of knowledge it becomes more plausible to speak about alternative approaches to knowledge. The newer approaches to epistemology should allow the church to articulate its faith without needing to follow the eighteenth century apologists' model of acquiescing to the confines of the reigning worldview. It would seem that because all knowledge is perspectival the church need only state that its message is being put forward from the perspective of Christian presuppositions. The problem with this approach is that the cultural context of the late-modern west is not only post-Enlightenment but it is also post-Christian, which means that though this approach is valid for other faith systems, Christianity is seen to have been tried and found wanting leaving resistance to the Christian faith and its truth claims. The problem of the incommensurability of the gospel message that Newbigin's approach brings is that if the gospel can only be understood from within the fiduciary framework that it itself provides, how does one come to believe it?

One approach is the temporary suspension of disbelief. An analogy for this would be the way that earlier in the last century instead of going to an optician an individual would simply go to the local store and try on spectacles; whichever pair helped most they would purchase. The evangelist seeks to present the gospel as an alternative lens through which to understand the world. The grounds of justification are the explanatory power and pragmatic effectiveness of the gospel as a worldview and thus the need to provide a rational justification in accepting the Christian faith is shortcut. This is the approach taken by the presuppositional apologists of whom Cornelius Van Til[192] and more recently John Frame[193] are significant exemplars. They reject the notion of an objective position outside the Christian faith from which to test the gospel's truth claims

[192] Van Til(1963) is a standard introduction.
[193] Frame(1996)

and advocate an approach that discounts the neutrality of reason. As will be seen Newbigin takes this approach, apparently quite independently to the reformed apologists. A problem with locating Newbigin's epistemological approach to apologetics as coherentist is his keenness to emphasise historical actuality of the gospel events, which would, at first sight, seem to contradict his coherentist approach. However Newbigin never uses this historical veracity of the gospel story as part of an apologetic. As will be shown Newbigin's historicity has a theological purpose rather than an apologetic one. For Newbigin it is vitally important that there is grounding of the gospel in reality, as it is not just a theoretical construct to make life easier. Newbigin, as will be shown, is highly committed to the role of the community that lives by the gospel to function as the temporary means that the truthfulness of the gospel story be demonstrated: temporary as eschatologically the coming of Christ himself will be the ultimate vindication of the gospel's truth claims. It will also be shown how for Newbigin the final answer to the incommensurability of divine revelation in the gospel is the doctrine of election. Newbigin's insistence and reliance on the sovereignty of God in apologetics is an important lesson for late-modern evangelism, as it protects the church from a zealous but ultimately panic-induced compromising of the gospel, as Frame states: "It is remarkable how many heresies are traceable to apologetic motives."[194]

2.3. The gospel: historical revelation

In "What is the Gospel" the first point of Newbigin's gospel presentation is "a statement about implied views about God" and he argues that Peter's gospel message implies that "God is a God of action and purpose"[195] and thus revelation occurs "through concrete historical events and there is no revelation apart from such events."[196] This is a highly

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[194] Frame(1996):28
[195] Newbigin(1942):5
[196] Newbigin(1942):5

significant statement as Newbigin throughout his writings continually upholds the historical veracity of the gospel events. For example: in "Truth to Tell"[197], written some forty-nine years later Newbigin writes

> "Christianity is a constantly changing phenomenon. The gospel, on the other hand, is news about things which have happened." [198]

Or again in one of the last books Newbigin wrote

> "It is of the essence of the Christian faith that this story is the true story."[199]
> The gospels are "human perceptions of the things that really happened.'[200]

The relationship between God and history is of the utmost importance to Newbigin as it is here that Christianity differs most radically from the Hinduism that dominated his first cross-cultural mission field. The historicity of the gospel is also a major point of divergence between Newbigin and the post-liberal theologians from whom he borrowed many insights.

2.3a Jesus: clue to human history

In Newbigin's thought there is an important link between the Bible as the story of God's dealing with his people and the Bible as universal history. In the posthumously published book "A Walk through the Bible"[201] Newbigin provides a non-technical overview of the Biblical story and particularly how Christ provides the hermeneutical key to the canon. Newbigin begins the book with a quotation from a Hindu friend:

> "I can't understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion… I find in your Bible a unique interpretation of human history…"[202]

This is a significant quotation which appears in many of Newbigin's writings[203] because by implication it helps him understand that Christ is not just the organising centre of

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[197] Newbigin(1991g)
[198] Newbigin(1991g):5
[199] Newbigin(1996b):40
[200] Newbigin(1996b):40
[201] Newbigin(1999)
[202] Newbigin(1999):4
[203] Newbigin(1990b):7 & (1989e):89

biblical narrative but also of human history. This is made explicit in several instances in Newbigin's work, for example a chapter entitled 'Christ, Clue to History' in "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society"[204] and also in a paper entitled "The Centrality of Jesus for History."[205] Newbigin's argument is sophisticated and is best examined through three summary clauses:

i. History cannot be written without selection of material, based on perceived significance.
ii. Significance cannot be decided until the overall point of the whole story of history is known.
iii. The end cannot be known unless it is revealed in history from someone outside of history.

Historiography is impossible without selection

Newbigin demonstrates an informed understanding of historiography, drawing on the work of E.H. Carr who describes history as "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past."[206] Carr critiques the subject-object dichotomy in empirical theories of history and replaces it with an interpretative/dialectical approach. A naïve realist approach to historiography, where the historian simply records facts is thus no longer tenable. If there is no inductive process of observation and theory generation in history then there must be another means by which selection of material is undertaken. Carr points out that selection of historical facts is due to an "*a priori* decision of the historian"[207] as to what is significant.

Significance cannot be decided until the end of history

This is a key stage in Newbigin's argument and is most concisely argued by Newbigin himself:

> "the final judgement of what is significant even for a small society will depend upon a judgement of what is significant for the whole story. But the story is not

[204] Newbigin(1989e)
[205] Newbigin(1979c)
[206] Carr(1986):24
[207] Carr(1986):55

> yet finished: how then can we know what is significant? It is always possible that there may be some surprising end and therefore no firm conclusions can be drawn by induction from the evidence so far available."[208]

The end of history cannot be known without revelation

Newbigin states very clearly that the kind of history one writes depends upon "one's belief about the point of the story"[209] or again that

> "indubitable knowledge of the meaning and goal of history will only be available when history has reached its terminus."[210]

This is the logic of special revelation for Newbigin and particularly for the revelation of God in Christ as the paradigmatic way that God reveals himself and so Christ provides the ultimate key to interpreting human history. Newbigin's argument is a counter-attack to the demythologising project. In a critique of "The Myth of God Incarnate" [211] Newbigin argues for the centrality of Christ for the knowledge of God.

> "If I begin not with my idea of God but with Jesus (the real Jesus in his context in the whole biblical story) then in following him I begin to learn to know God – a kind of knowledge which is not rumour or guesswork but the personal knowing that is love."[212]

Newbigin wants to start with Christ to define deity, a method following Barth and running counter to Newbigin's wider writings on the continuity/discontinuity debate regarding divine revelation in non-Christian religions, as he argues cogently for continuity in other places. This tension will be explored in the next chapter when Newbigin's approach to other religions will be examined.

Newbigin argues both for the historical veracity of the events of the gospel but also that the gospel provides the hermeneutical key to history. This may seem like a vicious circle, as Newbigin seems to be arguing that although the events of the gospel really took place in history they will only be accepted as historical events if they provide the

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[208] Newbigin(1979c):204
[209] Newbigin(1989e):90
[210] Newbigin(1989e):93
[211] Hick(1993)
[212] Newbigin(1990i):7

hermeneutical key for understanding history. Once again Newbigin's critics can accuse him of fideism, but, again, if Newbigin's approach is viewed from a coherentist, rather than foundationalist, epistemological framework, this accusation proves false. If instead of seeking to ground knowledge on the foundation of indubitable logical certainty and building up a system of proofs, a web of beliefs providing an interpretive framework with which to explore and evaluate truth claims is adopted, then there is the possibility of assuming the historical reliability of the gospel story and using that as part of an interpretive framework in which to assess the reliability of other truth claims.

2.3b Implications

Newbigin's insistence on the historical actuality of the gospel events provides the following pointers for a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures: a fixed *kerygma*, an awareness of focal reductionism and the resource of an alternative historical apologetic.

Newbigin's commitment to the historicity of the gospel is very significant in a late-modern context, where pragmatism is often given primacy over truth. The gospel story is often told for its rhetorical impact or its therapeutic value rather than for its historical veracity. The static nature of Newbigin's articulation of the gospel was a line of criticism taken at the outset of the analysis of Newbigin's 1942 gospel presentation. However, because a central part of the gospel is the recounting of historical events there is a sense that it is fixed. For the apostles the gospel was a body of truth that could be preached[213], guarded and passed on. It must also be reiterated that there is also a sense of fluidity to the gospel when recounting the significance of these events for the audience being addressed. This can be seen by following the apostolic evangelistic preaching recorded in the book of Acts. Even a cursory comparison between Peter's

[213] 2 Timothy 1:14; 2 Timothy 2:2

Pentecost sermon and Paul's Areopagus sermon demonstrates the very different ways that the significance of the historical events of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection are applied.

Newbigin's emphasis on Christ as the clue to human history is also important for contemporary evangelism. In evangelism Christ is often presented as important for salvation history or even for church life, but Newbigin encourages the evangelist to proclaim the significance of Christ for global history. This would offer a helpful counterbalance to the individualistic and therapeutic tendency in many current presentations of the gospel.

Newbigin does not use evidential arguments for the resurrection or the historical reliability of biblical manuscripts, instead as has been demonstrated he provides a powerful apologetic which brings into question the possibility of historiography without Christ. Newbigin's apologetic approach could be described as a "macro-historical apologetic" as it centres on the late-modern rejection of the objectivity promised under the Enlightenment. This line of argument seems well-suited to cultural contexts where the naive realist approach to history has been debunked by historiographers such as Carr.[214]

2.4. The gospel: particular revelation

In a programmatic essay "Can the West be Converted?"[215] Newbigin sets out the contours for a missional engagement between the gospel and western culture. Newbigin points out that the key area of contention in this engagement is over the nature of religious belief and specifically the bifurcation between the public world of facts and

[214] Carr(1986)
[215] Newbigin(1985a)

the private world of values. This observation plays such a significant part in Newbigin's missiological project that it is worth exploring some of the implications for Newbigin's doctrine of revelation and in particular his theology of evangelism.

Newbigin argues that the Enlightenment was the decisive moment in the dichotomy of western thought into the public and private. Thus a central element in Newbigin's apologetic approach is to tackle head-on this public/private dichotomy. Newbigin asks:

> "what in our culture is the meaning of the word "fact"? In its earliest use in the English language it is simply the Latin *factum,* the past participle of the verb "to do," something which has been done. But plainly it has acquired a much richer meaning. In ordinary use "fact" is contrasted with belief, opinion, value. Value-free facts are the most highly prized commodities in our culture."[216]

The public/private division in knowledge continues to this day: there is a distinction between, for example, religious truth and scientific truth, as Newbigin argues:

> "Our values, our views of what is good and bad, are a matter of personal opinion, and everyone is free to have his own opinions. But on the facts we must all agree. Here is the core of our culture."[217]

This distinction between scientific truth and religious values continues despite contemporary philosophical deconstructions of the myth of scientific objectivity by philosophers of science such as Karl Popper[218] and Thomas Kuhn.[219] Newbigin argues that this dualistic approach has "at least from the eighteenth century… been the public culture of Europe, and has – under the name of 'modernisation' – extended its power into every part of the world."[220] Objective facts are for the public realm, taught at school and presented without the need for the preface "I believe", while subjective values belong to the private world of religion and ethics.

> "With respect to what are called "facts" a statement is either right or wrong, true or false. But with respect to values, and supremely with respect to the religious beliefs on which these values ultimately rest, one does not use this kind of

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[216] Newbigin(1985a):30
[217] Newbigin(1985a):30
[218] Popper(1963)
[219] Kuhn(1970)
[220] Newbigin(1985a):30

language…. They are matters of personal choice."[221]

Due to the empiricist movement science was effectively elevated to become the arbiter of truth and along with this came the "corresponding downgrading of non-scientific systems of belief."[222] This scepticism of non-scientific truth claims can be clearly seen in the dismissive writings of David Hume:

> "If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."[223]

Hume limits real knowledge and hard facts to mathematics and empirical science whilst relegating ethics and theology to the irrational and subjective world of personal values. This same approach is described by Newbigin in his analysis of contemporary Western cultures. This fact-value dichotomy between science and religion became and was to remain a prevailing characteristic of modernity. The reaction to the elevation of science at the expense of values was that every other discipline tried to justify their existence by claiming to be a science. Paul Hiebert shows how many of the systematic theologies produced in the first half of the twentieth century reformulated theology in scientific terms.[224] Being dismissed into the realm of the subjective, Christians reacted by defending the truth of Christianity through appealing to the objective facts of the resurrection or through arguing for the concrete existence of God through rational, self-evident proofs. This is still evident in popular apologetics literature.[225]

In contrast late-modernity has a pessimistic view of the ability of the mind to grasp reality leading to the view that truth is a mind-dependent projection based on the context of the beholder in time and space. James Sire explains that under late-modernity, truth

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[221] Newbigin(1986c):16-17
[222] Taylor(1998):163
[223] Hume(1975) 12:3:11
[224] Hiebert(1994):19
[225] Geisler(1993), Moorland(1987)

cannot be objective because the "ontological substructure"[226] of the universe is not available, since an individual's mind looks at the world through a skewed perception of reality. Betty Craige illustrates this when she writes, "Things and events do not have an intrinsic meaning. There is no inherent objectivity, only continuous interpretation of the world."[227]

2.4a Newbigin and Polanyi

Late-modernity provides a much-needed criticism of the optimism and indeed arrogance of modernist claims to truth, but at the cost of relegating all truth to personal preference. An alternative epistemology is needed that will avoid the excesses of naïve objectivity of the modernist as well as the pessimistic subjectivity of many late-modern thinkers and provide a way for science and religion to transcend their status as subjective values and make valid universal truth claims. Newbigin found a philosophical co-advocate in Polanyi as he sought a way out of these two perilous extremes. In “Personal Knowledge” Polanyi offers a devastating critique of modernist conceptions of science on three fronts, its impersonal nature, its scepticism and its naïve realism. First, it is Polanyi's conviction that it is impossible for knowledge to be impersonal; it is always affected by the "personal coefficient."[228] It is the purpose of “Personal Knowledge” to show that "complete objectivity as usually attributed to the exact sciences is a delusion and a false ideal."[229] Secondly, Polanyi challenges the scepticism of modernist science. According to Polanyi, there are two types of doubt:[230] contradictory doubt occurs when a proposition is not believed because the doubter believes something else is true; agnostic doubt on the other hand occurs when the doubter believes that the proposition

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[226] Sire(1995):102
[227] quoted in Sire(1995):104
[228] Polanyi(1962):18
[229] Polanyi(1962):18
[230] Polanyi(1962):272

in question does not have sufficient grounds to be affirmed. Both of these types of doubt are fiduciary in nature: agnostic doubt "implies the acceptance of some not strictly indubitable framework"[231], whilst contradictory doubt is based on the belief in another proposition. The doubter is thus able to doubt, only because of the things "he believes without doubting."[232] Polanyi posits an alternative to the unworkable scepticism of the Enlightenment with a philosophy of commitment. Knowledge is only possible through a commitment to a "fiduciary framework."[233] Paul Weston[234] argues that Polanyi's influence on Newbigin began in the nineteen-sixties due to the recommendation of J.H.Oldham to read "Personal Knowledge". Weston suggests that Newbigin's first published interaction with Polanyi's work was in 1966 in "Honest Religion for Secular Man."[235] Weston underlines the fact that Newbigin's work was in continuity with Polanyi's especially in the area of personal knowledge. Weston could have provided evidence for this from Newbigin's programmatic essay "Revelation". Newbigin's key insight is in the area of the knowledge of God and it demonstrates Newbigin's theological commitment to points five to seven in the list below well before Polanyi had started his career in the philosophy of science and was practising Chemistry. Weston does not identify the earlier influence that Buber's work had on Newbigin that was demonstrated earlier in this chapter; in fact this correlation seems so far to have gone unnoticed in the growing body of work devoted to Newbigin's theology. Nevertheless the key areas of Polanyi's influence on Newbigin in "Honest Religion for Secular Man" are systemised by Weston into the following seven points which are worth investigating.

1. Knowledge as skill
2. Knowing is an activity of persons in community
3. Knowing involves risk and commitment

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[231] Polanyi(1962):274
[232] Newbigin(1989e):19
[233] Polanyi(1962):266
[234] Weston(2001):81
[235] Newbigin(1966a)

4. Faith and knowledge are not synonymous in biblical nor in everyday language
5. There are realities which we know by faith
6. Knowing God is to be understood as personal knowledge
7. Personal knowledge depends on mutual trust[236]

One of Polanyi's crucial arguments is that truth is knowable through reliance upon intellectual passions. Late-modern thinkers may interpret this as leading to pure subjectivism. Polanyi's conception of personal knowledge is that truth claims are made with "universal intent"[237], held not just for the individual but for all people. If something is believed to be true, it will be communicated, and the response of others is important as "general unbelief imperils our own convictions by evoking an echo in us. Our vision must conquer or die."[238] In science the personal convictions held must be endorsed by the greater scientific community or the convictions will not be accepted as science. Polanyi calls this dimension "conviviality"[239] or "the civic coefficients of our intellectual passions."[240] Every time a scientist speaks, (s)he either endorses or dissents from the consensus opinion, and by speaking or publishing beliefs about the truth (s)he calls people to believe a conception of "what the consensus ought to be"[241]. So the social dimension of personal knowledge is proof that it is not pure subjectivism.

Newbigin uses Polanyi's epistemological framework to argue for the truth of the gospel, rejecting the truth/values dichotomy in modernity, arguing that the gospel belongs to the public realm of truth not the privatised realm of values. Newbigin uses Polanyi's framework to argue for the universal truthfulness of the gospel making use of Polanyi's concept of holding a belief with "universal intent."[242] This allows for the humility of the evangelist to say that the gospel has not been finally proved according to any modernist

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[236] Weston(2001):87
[237] Polanyi(1962):65
[238] Polanyi(1962):150
[239] Polanyi(1962):203
[240] Polanyi(1962):203
[241] Polanyi(1962):209
[242] Polanyi(1962):65

conception of objective proof such that the gospel is open to refutation, (as Karl Popper would demand as the qualifying criteria for a statement to be scientific[243]) but that still the gospel is held with universal intent such that it is believed to the be the truth for all people everywhere. On the other hand recognising the mediating function of interpretive frameworks such that all truth claims are in some sense necessarily perspectival, Newbigin goes on to make use of Polanyi's concept of "tacit knowledge"[244] such that the gospel provides a framework through which reality may be accessed. Newbigin also makes use of Polanyi's "sociological coefficients"[245] in knowing, such that the notion of conviviality finds correspondence in Newbigin's understanding of the church as hermeneutic of the gospel. This approach will be further developed in the final section of the thesis on an evangelistic ecclesiology.

2.4b History and particularity

Newbigin's emphasis on the historical veracity of the gospel story is intrinsically tied to the particular nature of special revelation. The "scandal of particularity"[246] is well demonstrated by the infamous words of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing who argued that the "accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."[247] As will be shown it is this offence at the idea of the particular nature of special revelation that led to enthusiasm toward developing a universalised natural theology. Newbigin counters this statement by arguing vehemently for the particularity of the gospel events, to which he is unashamedly committed. He recounts that often in evangelistic conversation, after recounting the events of Jesus' life and the role of the church, the objection would arise of why God uses the history of a specific people in a

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[243] Popper(1963):256 Popper explains that *falsifiabilty* should be the grounds of demarcation between science and metaphysics.
[244] Polanyi(1962):264
[245] Polanyi(1962):203
[246] According to Dodd(1936):219 this phrase was coined by Gerhard Kittel in *Mysterium Christi* "das Argenis der Einmaligkeit"
[247] Chadwick, H. (ed.) (1956) *Lessing's Theological Writings: Selections in Translation with an introduction.* London: A.& C Black: 190 referred to but not referenced in Newbigin(1995i):54

specific time to mediate salvation to all: "cannot God deal with me directly without bringing another person, another religion, another culture into the business?"[248] Newbigin answers:

> "The answer is he can, but he will not. His purpose is precisely to break open that shell of egotism in which you are imprisoned since Adam first fell and to give you back the new nature which is content to owe the debt of love to all men."[249]

Newbigin argues that divine revelation is deliberately particular, because of God's election of one race "in order that through it God's salvation may be mediated to others"[250] Newbigin is adamant that the historical particularity of the gospel is part of God's plan to reconcile humanity with himself and in so doing create one united people of God through the mission of the church. God's intention to perform this double act of reconciliation: the divine-human and the inter-human restoration of relationships are inextricably linked to Newbigin's emphasis on the social and corporate elements of salvation that will be pursued in the next section. The complex relationships between special revelation, election, mission and ecclesiology will be explored in greater detail under the rubric of the missional church in chapter four.

2.4c Implications

Newbigin is very aware of the cultural context of the late-modern west and identifies the importance of a dialogue with the epistemological and methodological presuppositions that make the gospel appear less plausible. Newbigin engages with the culture head-on offering a critique of the myth of objectivity rather than reducing the gospel claims to mere values and personal beliefs. Newbigin demonstrates the sensitivity that cross-cultural missionary experience provides to know what to affirm and what to challenge in a culture; an issue that will be further examined under the rubric of the gospel as

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[248] Newbigin(1961b):81
[249] Newbigin(1961b):81
[250] Newbigin(1953):100

contextual revelation. But Newbigin shows the need for evangelism to be culturally aware to avoid a syncretism that leads to the cultural captivity of the gospel[251].

Newbigin offers a courageous articulation of the gospel that engages with the naïve empiricism that relegated the gospel to subjectivism on the one hand and avoided the relativism of late-modernity on the other. Newbigin offers a useful epistemological resource to the church by popularising Polanyi's work, and therefore the logical next step of the particularity of salvation will be briefly addressed.

2.5. The gospel is salvific revelation

Newbigin argues clearly not only for the historicity and particularity of the gospel events, but that these events are of universal significance because they are the means of salvation for the world. This part of Newbigin's evangel is best explored by examining firstly his conception of the nature of salvation and secondly Newbigin's approach to the extent of salvation and their implications for evangelism.

2.5a Nature of salvation

There is a significant relationship between the gospel and the nature of salvation, not just in the sense that the gospel is the means that salvation is accessed but also due to the evangelists' preconceptions of the nature of salvation influencing the content of the gospel itself. Newbigin's short work "Sin and Salvation"[252] provides a useful entry point to examine his conception of the nature of salvation. In a chapter entitled "What is Salvation?" Newbigin provides a four-dimensional schema for understanding the alienation that sin has brought to humanity:

- Man is in a state of contradiction against the natural world
- Man is in a state of contradiction against his fellow man
- Man is in a state of inner self-contradiction

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[251] Walls(1996a)
[252] Newbigin(1956)

- Man is in a state of contradiction against God

The repairing of these four fractured relationships is salvation as Newbigin understands it. Newbigin describes salvation as "the restoration of creation to its original purpose"[253] which has been warped and distorted by sin. This approach takes seriously the emotional, social, environmental and spiritual consequences of the fall and by highlighting all four areas, Newbigin offers a holistic vision of salvation. Goheen comments that "the context of Newbigin's reflections on salvation was the rift between ecumenical and evangelicals on social action produced by different understandings of salvation."[254] Newbigin's approach counteracts reductionist conceptions of salvation: the therapeutic gospel, the individualistic gospel, the social gospel, which are all exposed as at best half-truths. For example Newbigin argues against overly-individualised conceptions of the gospel as the key to fulfilment, which were part of a Christian response to "secularisation" more influenced by existentialism than scripture. Newbigin argues vehemently that the

> "gospel is vastly more than an offer to men who care to accept it as a meaning for their personal lives. It is the declaration of God's cosmic purpose by which the whole public history of mankind is sustained and overruled, and by which all men without exception will be judged. It is the invitation to be fellow workers with God in the fulfilment of that purpose through the atoning work of Christ and through the witness of the Holy Spirit."[255]

The advantage of this conceptualisation is that it avoids the extremes of fundamentalist and liberal conceptions. In an article written after the Thailand "Salvation Today and Tomorrow" conference of Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC in 1976, Newbigin describes two dialectical tensions in the biblical conception of salvation:

> "on the one hand salvation is both outward and inward; it concerns man's fellowship with God at the very heart of his experience of being human, and also

[253] Newbigin(1956):124
[254] Goheen(2001):292
[255] Newbigin(1966a):47

> concerns his social life with other men and his experience of the world of nature. On the other hand salvation is both present and future; it is both a present experience and future hope."[256]

The creative tension between these four axes: inward and outward, present and future is one which Newbigin seeks to keep in balance in his articulation of the nature of salvation.

2.5b Extent of salvation

Howard Netland states succinctly the importance of the issue of the extent of salvation for evangelism:

> "One cannot understand the Catholic missionary movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or the remarkable Protestant missionary pioneers such as William Carey, Adoniram Judson, David Livingstone and Hudson Taylor, without appreciating the fundamental assumption of the missionary movement. Salvation is to be found in the person and work of Jesus Christ and those who die without having made a commitment to Christ face an eternity apart from God."[257]

The most contentious facet of the gospel is the historic claim of the church of the uniqueness of Christ. Newbigin is fully aware of both the fact and the ideology of pluralism present in the late-modern west; he writes that the fact that "Britain is a plural society is a fact no one can deny. Peoples of many ethnic origins and many different religious commitments live together in our cities and share our public life."[258] Newbigin differentiates the cultural fact of a plural society from the ideology of pluralism where

> "religious belief is a private matter. Each of us is entitled to have… a faith of our own. This is religious pluralism, and is a widely held opinion in contemporary British society."[259]

Therefore the historic claim of the church of the exclusivity of salvation through faith in Christ alone has become one of the most disputed issues in contemporary theology. There have been a number of responses to this issue and Paul Knitter's tripartite

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[256] Newbigin(1974c):106
[257] Netland(1991):14
[258] Newbigin(1989e):14
[259] Newbigin(1989e):14

description of soteriological approaches to other religions has become the standard taxonomy in this field. Knitter, in his renowned book, "No Other Name?",[260] outlines three views of other religions: exclusive, inclusive, and pluralistic.[261] However a wider, but even still not exhaustive, spectrum of soteriological approaches can be identified:

Universalism

All humanity will be saved irrespective of the particularities of their beliefs.

Unitive pluralism

Jesus is not the only saviour and the major world religions are all valid ways of relating to ultimate reality so people will be saved through their own religions.

Inclusivism

God saves people only because of the work of Christ, but people may be saved even if they do not know about Christ but have responded to "creation and providence."[262]

Exclusive Restrictive

God saves people only through the work of Christ and it is necessary to consciously believe in Christ to receive salvation. The word restrictivism is more descriptive than simply exclusivism as there are some that believe people are saved only through the work of Christ but this will be effective for all people as all will one day acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This appears to be what Barth hoped for.[263]

Divine Perseverance / Postmortem evangelization

This position states that those who die unevangelised will be given an opportunity for salvation after death.

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[260] Knitter(1985)
[261] Beyerhaus(1996):134
[262] Sanders(1995):13
[263] Sanders(1995):13

Where does Newbigin's understanding of the gospel place him on the above spectrum of positions on the saving efficacy of non-Christian religions? Newbigin answers this question in a chapter entitled "No Other Name" contained in "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society". Newbigin admits that his line of thought "would be regarded as an expression of a type of exclusive claim for the gospel which was typical of the missionary movement of the past two hundred years"[264] yet Newbigin is openly critical of the triumphalism, imperialism and colonialism of much of the mission work of that generation.[265] There is of course another side to this description of the modern missionary movement, which in recent years has been voiced particularly by Christians from the formerly colonised nations.[266] For example Lamin Sanneh and Vinoth Ramachandra from Gambia and Sri Lanka respectively argue for the way in which western missions actually preserved many of the indigenous languages and cultures to which the gospel was taken and Newbigin does not dismiss the whole eighteenth century mission project out of hand, despite distancing himself from the methodologies of colonial and imperial expansion. Newbigin refuses to adopt what he has described as the "contemporary orthodoxy"[267] which is the rejection of Christian claims to have "the truth for all" which can "only be regarded as treason against the human race."[268] Newbigin criticises the relativistic approach of authors such as Paul Knitter, John Hick and Stanley Samartha on three fronts.

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[264] Newbigin(1989e):155
[265] Newbigin(1974c):123
[266] see Sanneh(1993) and Ramachandra(1996)
[267] Newbigin(1989e):156
[268] Newbigin(1989e):156

2.5c Newbigin's critique of relativism

Overestimation of the uniqueness of pluralism

Many of the above authors contend that the pluralism of the contemporary cultural contexts is a "radically new situation which the church has not faced before."[269] Newbigin has history and biblical witness on his side when he argues "this is clearly not the case. The world into which the first Christians carried the gospel was a religiously plural world."[270] However Newbigin does admit that globalisation affects pluralism in a different way to the first century church.

Simplistic approach to non-Christian religions

In contradistinction to the mystical approach of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Newbigin rejects notions that "all religions are variants of one central human experience."[271] Under this view "The Transcendent" may be conceived in any way that the worshipper may choose, "there can be no such thing as false or misdirected worship."[272] Thus Newbigin rejects an imperialistic homogenising tendency within the thought of authors such as Hick and Smith who assert, over and against the stated beliefs of adherents of the various religions, that all religions are ultimately the same. This can be interpreted as an attempt at providing an oppressive totalising discourse that rejects the particularity of the various religions and under the paradigm of late-modernity can be rejected as a modernist approach to comparative religion.

The problem of relativism

Newbigin alludes to the difficulty in stating the notion of relativism without self-contradiction.[273] The relativists' claim that all truth is relative is a self-inclusive

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[269] Newbigin(1989e):157
[270] Newbigin(1989e):157
[271] Newbigin(1989e):160
[272] Newbigin(1989e):160
[273] Newbigin(1989e):162

statement which would imply that all truth is not relative. But Newbigin moves beyond this to tackle in passing the notion that "a claim to absolute truth must be oppressive."[274] Newbigin does not deal here directly with the progenitor of this epistemological position, Jean Michel Foucault, but rather tackles the work of Langdon Gilkey. A full treatment of this subject is not possible here, but Newbigin's brief response is worth quoting:

> "The claim of the Christian community is that in Jesus absolute truth has been made present amid the relativities of human cultures, and that the form which these truths took was not that of dominance and imperial power but that of one who was without power, or–rather– whose power was manifest in weakness and suffering."[275]

This anticipates the work of Graham Tomlin who also argues that the cross "is not solely a soteriological event which remains locked in the past, but is a paradigm for the way that God always works."[276] The cross also provides a subversive apologetic in its demonstration of the non-oppressive use of power. Newbigin can go so far as to write:

> "the revelation of God's saving love and power in Jesus entitles and requires me to believe that God purposes the salvation of all men, but it does not entitle me to believe that this purpose is to be accomplished in any way that… bypasses the historic event by which it was in fact revealed and effected."[277]

2.5d Newbigin's critique of exclusivism

Newbigin states that "the truth by which humankind can become one… that truth… is the man Jesus Christ in whom God was reconciling the world. The truth is personal, concrete, historical."[278] It is at this point that Newbigin makes the contentious statement that "to make that confession does not mean, as critics seem to assume, that God's saving mercy is limited to Christians and the rest of the world is lost."[279] For

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[274] Newbigin(1989e):163
[275] Newbigin(1989e):163
[276] Tomlin(1997):70
[277] Newbigin(1995h):177
[278] Newbigin(1989e):170
[279] Newbigin(1989e):170

evangelicals this is one of Newbigin's most controversial statements as he rejects exclusivism. Newbigin provides three grounds for this rejection.

Exclusivism would legitimate improper means of evangelisation

Newbigin argues that if exclusivism "were true it would not only be permissible but obligatory to use any means available, all the modern techniques of brainwashing included, to rescue others from this appalling fate."[280] This is a weak argument as it is hard to find a single advocate of this approach to evangelism amongst exclusivists. Exclusivists do not claim that the exclusive availability of salvation through Christ negates Christ's ethical teaching; therefore the ends cannot be used to justify the means in evangelisation. Christ has specified the methodology to be used as witness and persuasion therefore it is incumbent upon exclusivists to employ these alone.

Exclusivism leads inexorably to judgementalism

"[I]f we hold this view, it is absolutely necessary to know who is saved and who is not, and we are then led into making the kind of judgements against which scripture warns us."[281] Again this is a weak argument from Newbigin as it does not necessarily follow that those holding the exclusivist position are claiming to know exactly who is saved and who is not. Christ is the exclusive means of salvation but the knowledge of who has and has not put their faith in him is limited to God alone as only he can search minds and hearts.

Exclusivism rejects any continuity with cultures

Newbigin's third argument against exclusivism appears equally weak when he states that "anyone who has had intimate friendship with a devout Hindu or Muslim would find it impossible to believe that the experience of God of which his friends speaks is

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[280] Newbigin(1989e):173
[281] Newbigin(1989e):173

simply illusion or fraud."[282] Elsewhere Newbigin follows Jesus' rebuke of the delusion of Pharisaical religion, and he has no difficulty in arguing that there is self-deception in sincerely-felt Pharisaic religious experience. Newbigin's argument pays little attention to the doctrine of common grace which will be explored in the next chapter. Common grace would allow for genuine experiences of God in non-Christian religions without implying salvific knowledge.

Although Newbigin is not willing to accept exclusivism he is critical of the inclusivism exemplified by Karl Rahner who argues that religions are God's salvific tools to bring humanity, often without specific knowledge of the fact, to salvation through an unknown Christ. Newbigin argues that there are two poles that any approach to salvation must hold in tension, firstly the "appalling sin of the world" and secondly the "amazing grace of God".[283] The extent of sin in the world makes universalism untenable for Newbigin: "there is no life-or-death decision to be made";[284] we can relax and be assured that everything will be alright for everybody in the end. Over much theological writing about the gospel and the world's religions one is tempted to write the famous words: "You have not yet taken full account of sin."[285] But on other hand, Newbigin argues that God's amazing grace means that the exclusivist is mistaken as he "may be so conscious of the abyss of sin from which only the grace of God in Jesus Christ could rescue him that he is unwilling to believe that the same grace can operate in ways beyond his experience and understanding."[286]

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[282] Newbigin(1989e):174
[283] Newbigin(1989e):176
[284] Newbigin(1989e):176
[285] Newbigin(1989e):176
[286] Newbigin(1989e):176

2.5e Newbigin's critique of evangelical soteriology

Newbigin argues that salvation concerns more than the destination of the post-mortem soul, and he goes on to argue that therefore questions relating to "what happens to the non-Christian after death" are wrong-headed, providing three arguments to justify his position:

Individualistic

Newbigin shows how the question "How can I be saved?" leads inevitably to the question "How can anyone be saved?" Newbigin argues that this is a perversion of the gospel, as anyone who has understood what God did in Christ should ask "How shall God be glorified?"[287] In this line of argument Newbigin demonstrates a courageous commitment to honouring God over pandering to human self-interest. He analyses the extent to which individualism has infiltrated the church whilst setting up a false dichotomy between the believer seeking assurance and the bringing of glory to God. Scripture however is replete with passages where assurance of salvation is the author's intention.[288] Jesus himself is offering assurance and comfort to his disciples when he states that he is going to prepare a place for them in his father's house and that only through faith in him is the final destination of the father's house available. Significantly Newbigin interprets the father's house as the church:

> "the father's house is not a building made with hands. Nor is it another world beyond death. It is that new dwelling place of God in the Spirit which is constituted by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead… the place is not to be understood simply as the destination of their journey; rather there are many "abiding places" on the way, but they are all within the father's house."[289]

Thus Newbigin reinterprets this passage to fit his own discomfort with assurance of salvation for the individual believer.

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[287] Newbigin(1989e):179
[288] e.g. 1 John 5:12; John 5:20; Romans 8:18-34
[289] Newbigin(1982c):180

Dualistic

Newbigin argues that "by concentrating on the fate of the individual soul after death, it abstracts the soul from the full reality of the human person as an actor and sufferer in the ongoing history of the world."[290] There are two concerns here, one is a docetic tendency to focus on the soul and ignore the body and the second that the eschatological dimension of salvation is overemphasised. Newbigin's first concern identifies a major flaw of much evangelical missiology that has ignored the holism of biblical anthropology. Newbigin's fourfold understanding of salvation explored in the previous section provides a helpful corrective to this tendency. The second concern is that the question of the soteriological efficacy of other faiths misconstrues the nature of salvation focussing only on the other-worldly post-mortem destination of individuals and that, though important, it is not the "be-all and end-all of religions".[291] Newbigin's criticisms are valid, as the church has often focussed on the eschatological dimension of salvation rather than its present implications. Newbigin's schema for interpreting the biblical notion of salvation continues to be the dialectic tensions explored under the nature of salvation: inward and outward; present and future. But nevertheless the ultimate future of an individual and God's current relationship with an individual are intimately connected. According to the apostle Paul when someone becomes a Christian a new creation has begun in them that signals the renewing work of the Spirit culminating in eternity with God.[292] So there is continuity between a person's current relationship with God and their eternal future. If they are currently alienated from God due to their sin and God's wrath then this is an urgent issue that must be addressed and therefore intentional agnosticism on the issue of the soteriological efficacy of the world religions is of no help.

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[290] Newbigin(1989e):178
[291] Bosch(1988b):144
[292] 2 Corinthians 4

Irreverent

Newbigin writes that Jesus repeatedly warned that

> "the last day would be a day of surprises, of reversals, of astonishment. In his most developed parable of the last judgement, the parable of the sheep and the goats, both the saved and the lost are astonished."[293]

Newbigin's interpretation of the surprise element of the judgement does not take into account that these warnings came to the covenant people of God, the Jews. Jesus warned Jewish people, and the religious establishment at that, not to be overconfident of their standing before God because by their actions they had denied the terms of the covenant. Jesus' message was in line with that of the Old Testament prophets who argued that not all of Israel would be saved but only a faithful remnant. This seems the thrust of Jesus' teaching in the gospels on the surprise element of the final judgement. C.H. Dodd, J. Jeremias and more recently N.T. Wright support this reading of the parables in Matthew 24:45-25:30, locating the judgement historically with the fall of Jerusalem.[294] Newbigin argues from these passages that the Christian must in no way be overconfident or cavalier in approaching the final judgement, stating in similar lines to Barth that "the frontier between belief and unbelief runs through our own hearts, our own churches."[295] Thus there will be surprise for some professing Jews and Christians that they will not be saved. But investigation of the passages cited leaves no justification for Newbigin's application that people from non-judaeo-Christian faiths will be surprised by their salvation on the day of judgement. Newbigin states that when in dialogue with a person of a non-Christian religion; "I do not claim to know in advance his or her ultimate destiny. I meet the person simply as a witness, as one who has been laid hold of by another and placed in a position where I can only point to Jesus..."[296]

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[293] Newbigin(1989e):177
[294] Wright(1996):364 Wright over-emphasises the fall of Jerusalem to the exclusion of any form of future judgement, without acknowledging the fall of Jerusalem as a type or foretaste for the ultimate day of judgement.
[295] Bosch(1988b):136
[296] Newbigin(1995h):174

Gabriel Fackre describes this position as "an intentional silence."[297] Newbigin positions himself between the exclusivist and the inclusivist positions, confident of the uniqueness of Christ and yet unwilling to pronounce on the ultimate salvation of non-Christians. Newbigin describes his position in the following terms:

> "exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ, but not… in the sense of denying the possibility of salvation of the non-Christian… inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to the members of the Christian Church, but it rejects the inclusivism which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious work of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ."[298]

This appears to demonstrate that Newbigin is closer to the exclusivist position, where Jesus is the only means of salvation, but that God is working in all people. Newbigin denies the saving efficacy of other religions, as there is truly "no other name"[299] in heaven and on earth by which men must be saved, but one does not need to be consciously aware of the work of Christ in order to receive salvation from it. Hunsberger cites criticism from Gavin D'Costa that "Newbigin and others seem to want to relieve this exclusivist internal tension without paying the price in terms of the theological implications of their answer."[300] Newbigin himself is aware of this criticism as he cites Wesley Ariarajah's rebuke of Visser't Hooft who had written that "I don't know whether a Hindu is saved: I only know that salvation comes from Jesus Christ."[301] The criticisms however are weighty as Newbigin wants all the benefits of an inclusivist position without ignoring the Bible's exclusivist language.

Newbigin provides important resources for re-examining current trends in soteriology. Firstly, Newbigin argues vehemently and cogently against relativism, secondly he

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[297] cited in Hunsberger(1998):225
[298] Newbigin(1989e):182
[299] Newbigin(1989e):155
[300] cited in Hunsberger(1998):229
[301] Newbigin(1989e):175

helpfully challenges Christians to have a broader view of salvation as a holistic phenomenon encompassing body, soul, individual, community and environment. Thirdly Newbigin emphasises the present implications of salvation coming to a believer. Nevertheless Newbigin's desire to distance himself from what he describes as an arrogant exclusivist approach to soteriology prohibits him from commenting on the eternal destiny of those outside of faith in Christ.

2.5f Implications

Much time has been spent exploring Newbigin's soteriology as the extent of salvation is one of the most contentious issues in contemporary theology and is naturally a vitally important facet of a theology of evangelism. Without an adequate grasp of soteriology the gospel can be easily deformed into two equally dangerous mutations: an individualistic therapeutic message offering eschatological assurance with no contemporary implications – this is the gospel that appeals to consumerist[302] western cultures and is often espoused by evangelicals. The equal and opposite danger is to argue that the response to the gospel has no eternal consequences. Newbigin's soteriology does not seem to stand up to the critique of writers such as Fackre who accuse Newbigin of not having the courage of his convictions. Just as Newbigin criticised the accommodation of the church to modernism so it seems possible to critique Newbigin's wilfully agnostic soteriology as an accommodation to late-modern relativism.

2.6. The gospel: narrative revelation [303]

The narrative form holds particular significance for Newbigin's articulation of the gospel. Even Newbigin's Christological emphasis is not simply a functional representation of Christ as saviour, mediator or Messiah. Newbigin portrays the

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[302] Davie argues that in modern Britain religion has become a "leisure pursuit… which competes for the public's attention alongside all sorts of other pastimes. Davie(1994):194

[303] See Hunsberger(1998):269

character of Christ through the deliberate recounting of stories. Narrative is an essential part of the gospel as the gospel is essentially the story of Christ's life, death and resurrection and therefore there is an implicit narrative structure. The use of narrative has major apologetic implications for a theology of evangelism for a late-modern context.

There are contemporary challenges to the apologetic use of narrative, for example the French-born semiotician Roland Barthes raises the objection that all claims to narrative referentiality are fallacious, stating that

> "claims concerning the 'realism' of narrative are to be discounted… the function of narrative is not to 'represent' it is to constitute a spectacle… 'What takes place' in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally nothing."[304]

Barthes critique appears to cut the historical ground from the feet of the gospel writers. Old Testament scholar V. Long responds to Barthes' referential pessimism by claiming there are different types of narrative which can be identified by their intended purpose. The degree to which a narrative is constrained by the actualities of the subject matter determines whether the narrative is representational or aesthetic.[305]

Long describes historians as "verbal representational artists."[306] Long argues that all artists are presented with choices on how to depict their subject matter. According to Long, the artistry of the gospel writers was constrained by three factors. The *historiographical* impulse causes the gospel writers to be influenced by the actual events of Jesus' life. There is also *theological* constraint; just as no historian can claim objectivity but is selective in order to achieve a persuasive purpose, so the gospel writers edited the sources available to them to accomplish their pastoral/apologetic

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[304] cited in Long(1994):65
[305] Long(1994):70
[306] Long(1994):70

purpose. Thirdly, the *literary* constraint means that the gospel writers were influenced by the aesthetics of their chosen genre. The gospel writers therefore, as verbal representational artists, shaped the historic account of the life of Jesus in such a way as to be historically faithful, theologically provocative and aesthetically pleasing.

The first gospel writer, Mark, took a significant step in writing a narrative gospel as up until his work, at least in its written form, the gospel was predominantly a propositional proclamation. This can be seen by comparing the gospel that the Pauline corpus provides with Mark's presentation. The biographical details of Jesus[307] provided by Paul are minimal. This lack of biographical detail in Pauline preaching prompts Martin and Schweizer to argue that Mark's Gospel is a supplement to Paul's kerygma. Martin states, "Mark's task as the first evangelist is to spell out the relation between the experienced good news of God's salvation and the theologically interpreted historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth."[308] Thus Mark may possibly be the first published Christian narrative theologian. Mark has applied the term gospel to his narrative work on the life of Christ identifying the entire work as a proclamation of the good news. Therefore Mark's classification of his work as 'gospel' is highly significant as it means the life, acts and words of Jesus are kerygmatic. This has the effect of safeguarding against proto-docetic tendencies and also counters attempts to de-historicise Jesus, to separate his work from his words or the Christ of history from the Christ of faith. Since narrative has an important function in biblical evangelistic theology, the question arises how narrative provides resources for evangelism in a late-modern contexts.

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[307] although "the possibility must be allowed that Paul laid greater emphasis on the pre-crucifixion events and the character of Jesus in his preaching than he does in his epistles." Stanton,G. (1974) *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching - Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, Volume 27*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press :113 cited in Mounce(1993):736

[308] Martin(1994):27

2.6a The gospel medium

Since the 1960's, Marshal McLuhlan's dictum, "the medium is the message," has been in popular parlance. McLuhlan argued that "societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication."[309] Newbigin's emphasis on narrative rather than a reductionistic propositionalism is pertinent to the place of narrative within late-modern thought and contemporary evangelism. There has been much ink spilled over the nature of propositional revelation. Historically evangelicals such as Carl Henry have fought long and hard to defend revelation as essentially propositional.[310] Barth's theology emphasises the event of revelation over the propositional content of revelation, leading to a long debate. There is merit on both sides of the argument; at one level revelation is not merely propositional– the propositions mediate revelation but are not revelatory in themselves; propositions are the means God uses to mediate himself to humanity. Calvin's term 'accommodation' describes God's condescension in allowing himself to be known through human words. On the other hand, Barth's insistence on the sovereignty and freedom of God means that God's revelation is not held captive in a book and is not at man's disposal; God chooses when and where he discloses himself. This makes sense of the noetic effects of sin and the fact that some will be ever-hearing but never seeing.[311] It may be a mediating position to argue that in scripture God does not always reveal himself through propositions but he never reveals himself without them. The propositions are not isolated statements of truth and even the often misquoted fundamentalists such as B.B.Warfield were aware of the diversity of genres in scripture.

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[309] McLuhan(1967):8 see Postman(1987)
[310] Henry(1976-1983) see Decker(2001)
[311] Luke 8:10 citing Isaiah 6:9

Because most of scripture is narrative in its genre, the rediscovery of the apologetic usefulness of this genre is a major step forward in biblical evangelism.

2.6b Narrative and late-modernity

Jean-François Lyotard questioned the plausibility of metanarratives,[312] which David Harvey defines as "large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application"[313], literally grand stories that provide the framework into which all other stories fit and in effect define "the world and the place of inquiry in it."[314] In practice metanarratives provide the highest court of appeal for all questions and are the common-sense shared values of a community, which Lyotard refers to as the "apparatus of legitimation."[315] The essential difference between modernity and late-modernity for writers such as Lyotard is the question of the legitimisation of knowledge. He describes modernity as a commitment to discourse that legitimates itself by "making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative."[316] Modernism was the product of the Enlightenment-generated metanarrative based on "a faith in rationality and an optimistic belief in human progress."[317] Under late-modernity it is neither necessary nor desirable to refer to a metanarrative for epistemological justification as, according to Lyotard, the desire for legitimisation is the distinguishing mark of Western imperialism.[318] This kind of appeal to a metanarrative is seen as epistemological imperialism because of the assumed universal validity of the metanarrative. Terry Eagleton describes metanarratives as having a "secretly terroristic function" of grounding "the illusion of 'universal' human history."[319] Metanarratives are seen as providing the grounds for tyrannical domination

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[312] Lyotard(1997): xxiii
[313] Harvey(1989):9
[314] Cahoone(1996):481
[315] Lyotard(1997):xxiv
[316] Lyotard(1997):xxiii
[317] Walker(1996):56
[318] Lyotard(1997b):81
[319] cited in Harvey(1989):9

over opposing views. Under late-modernity "expediency" or "performativity"[320] are sufficient justifications for validity in themselves. Scepticism toward metanarratives results in the rejection of the possibility of a shared epistemological framework. This in turn has led to developments in the philosophy of language and literature leading to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, where there is near-total pessimism of the possibility of communication.[321] With the rejection of grand narratives, individual stories play a more significant role as they are seen to justify themselves without recourse to a larger metanarrative.

2.6c Narrative apologetics

The question arises of how to present the gospel in the face of rising scepticism toward metanarratives. The traditional approach under modernism to legitimate the claims of Christianity was to use foundationalist[322] apologetics, which attempted to justify the truthfulness of Christian beliefs by starting with a set of foundational indubitable beliefs from which to infer God's existence.[323] As has been shown, Newbigin rejects this approach as he argues that it fails to recognise the extent to which cultures affect rationality. The most vehement critics of foundational apologetics have been the reformed presuppositional apologists who follow Cornelius Van Til's rejection of autonomous reason because of the noetic effects of sin. Presuppositional apologists argue that in commending the gospel to others, the "properly basic"[324] belief in the existence of the God of the Bible must be first assumed, and then the rationality of the Christian faith will be evident. In contrast firstly to rationalistic foundationalist

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[320] Cahoone(1996):481

[321] The self-contradictory nature of all attempts to communicate incommunicability is not seen as a problem to this view and attempts to raise this issue are dismissed as modernist.

[322] Current advocates of this approach such as the American apologists John Gerstner, RC Sproul and Arthur Lindsey argue that foundationalism is the classical approach to apologetics, pointing to "Augustine, Luther, Calvin, seventeenth century orthodoxy, Eastern and Roman Orthodoxy" as exemplars. Frame(1994):221

[323] Geisler(1993)

[324] This term was coined by the Christian philosopher and apologist Alvin Platinga from Notre Dame University.

apologetics and secondly to the reformed presuppositional apologetics, Newbigin's use of narrative apologetics is a vital resource to communicate the gospel in a late-modern environment.

2.6d Communicating personality

Newbigin returns to Buber's differentiation between acquiring "I-It" and "I-Thou" knowledge arguing that natural theology provides only "I-it" knowledge of God and the "I-Thou" personal encounter with God is only possible when we surrender our sovereign autonomy and respond to God's self-disclosure of his character in the narrative of scripture. Newbigin's approach to natural theology will be considered in detail in the next chapter, but for now the emphasis on personal revelation is significant as it provides support for divine sovereignty in revelation. This instinct which is a dominant Barthian theme dates back to Newbigin's earliest written work in this area predating his primary engagement with Barthian theology.[325] It is Newbigin's contention that because God is personal and relational he reveals himself through narrative. Newbigin provides the following illustration:

> "consider what it means to get to know a person. One can read an account of his character and career such as might be embodied in an obituary notice. But in order to know a person one must see how she meets situations, relates to other people, acts in times of crisis and in times of peace. It is in narrative that character is revealed, and there is no substitute for this."[326]

Thus we are given the narrative of scripture to reveal God's character. For example, throughout God's long covenantal relationship with Israel he reveals himself not simply through a series of propositional statements but in the concrete realities of his historical dealings with his people. In the New Testament this is even more clearly demonstrated as God's character is revealed through the incarnation and the narrative accounts of Jesus' life. Newbigin's doctrine of God influences his doctrine of revelation but he

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[325] Newbigin's main exposure to Barthian theology occurred in the 1970s when on his return from India, Newbigin read Church Dogmatics although he had had interaction with Barth through WCC.
[326] Newbigin(1989e):99

would argue that his doctrine of God comes from divine revelation. This is a virtuous rather than a vicious circle, a hermeneutical spiral that allows one's reading of scripture to inform one's doctrine of scripture.

> "The dogma, the thing given for our acceptance in faith, is not a set of timeless propositions: it is a story… here I think the eighteenth century defenders of the faith were most wide of the mark. The Christian religion which they sought to defend was a system of timeless metaphysical truths about God, nature, and man… Any defence of the Christian faith… must take a quite different route. The Christian faith, rooted in the Bible, is… primarily to be understood as an interpretation of the story- the human story set with the story of nature." [327]

Newbigin's rejection of an approach to evangelism and apologetics that is simply a defence of timeless propositional truths resonates with the late modern antipathy towards supposed objectivity and similarly his advocacy of narrative is timely. But his description of the Christian faith as an interpretation of the entire human story runs counter to the late-modern suspicion towards metanarratives[328].

2.6e Relating personal stories to the Bible's grand narrative

In an article where Newbigin has attributed the liberal/fundamentalist split to common acquiescence to modernity, Newbigin argues instead that:

> "the true understanding of the Bible is that it tells a story of which my life is a part, the story of God's tireless, loving, wrathful, inexhaustible patience with the human family, and of our unbelief, blindness, disobedience. To accept this story as the truth of the human story (and so of my story) commits me personally to a life of discernment and obedience in the new circumstances of each day.[329]

Newbigin's narrative apologetic centres around locating an individual's story within the biblical story, which corresponds with the analysis of the sociologist Anthony Giddens, who explains how the rejection of metanarratives affects contemporary understanding of the self in terms of episodic self-authentication:

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[327] Newbigin(1989e):12-13
[328] However, this suspicion towards metanarratives could be criticised as an attempt to provide a universal narrative of suspicion. Thus rejection of metanarratives can be read as a covert attempt to replace current metanarratives with a new anti-metanarrative narrative!
[329] Newbigin(1994d):204

> "the reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continually revised, biographical narratives takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems."[330]

Giddens explains that modernity has undermined the role of tradition in society and brought suspicion on previously accepted narrative explanations of an individual's role in society. This has led to the emphasis on creation of personal identity through personal choice. Bauman argues that "needing to *become* what *one is* is the hallmark of modern living."[331] Giddens explains that these choices are not made within a vacuum but "there are standardising influences too– most notably in the form of commodification."[332] Thus consumer identities are influenced by market-forces and advertising, and the media provides a new narrative to replace traditional ones. Giddens goes on to argue that in late-modernity there is "a repression of moral questions that day-to-day life poses."[333] This can be read through the perspective of the consumerism thesis that moral questions slow down or limit consumption, therefore they are avoided by advertisers and in an increasingly consumer society self-identity and moral questions are poles apart. Giddens states that the repression of moral questions is not wholly successful "in high modernity where systems of instrumental control have been more nakedly exposed than ever before and their negative consequences become more apparent, many forms of counter-reaction appear."[334] The potential for the biblical metanarrative to provide an alternative to consumer-based narrative identities is a highly significant evangelistic opportunity. The narrative world of the scriptures answers many of the existential moral questions that Giddens describes.

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[330] Giddens(1991):5
[331] Bauman(2002):xv
[332] Giddens(1991):5
[333] Giddens(1991):9
[334] Giddens(1991):9

2.6f Story and truth

Newbigin is adamant that the biblical story is actually historically true. As will be seen this is where Newbigin parts company with most post-liberal narrative theologians who argue that the Christian story is simply one story amongst many and that theology in general and biblical theology in particular is simply a second-order internal discipline for the Christian community. Newbigin's reliance on Polanyi's concept of "universal intent" is significant as it means there can be a non-foundational approach to the justification of knowledge that also avoids relativism. Newbigin makes this explicit when he distinguishes the Christian approach to epistemic justification from Buddhism which holds that

> "the truths which Buddhism teaches would… be true whether or not Gautama had discovered and promulgated them. But the whole of Christian teaching would fall to the ground if it were the case that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were not events in real history."[335]

Newbigin is not offering a naive bypass to the effects of cultural context by arguing that a narrative approach means direct access to the biblical text and therefore to the pure unadulterated gospel. Instead Newbigin demonstrates awareness of the existence of interpretive frameworks prior to the reading of any text and understands the act of reading scripture as an ongoing conversation between a believer and their imperfect worldview and scripture.

> "the person who allows the biblical story to be the all-surrounding ambience of daily life and who continually seeks to place all experiences in this context finds that daily life is a continuous conversation with the one whose character is revealed in the biblical story taken as a whole."[336]

Newbigin argues that the world should be interpreted through the lens of the gospel not the gospel through the lens of the world. This can be put technically in terms of a hermeneutical spiral, borne out in another citation which demonstrates Newbigin's

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[335] Newbigin(1989e):66
[336] Newbigin(1995i):88

awareness of the process of reformation and the fallibility of the interpretation of the world:

> "the Christian community is invited to indwell the story, tacitly aware of it as shaping the way we understand but focally attending to the world we live in so we are able to confidently, though not infallibly, to increase our understanding of it and our ability to cope with it."[337]

Apart from the obvious influence of Polanyi here it is also clear that Newbigin has been affected by post-liberal narrative theologians such as George Lindbeck and Hans Frei. Newbigin was aware of the work of Lindbeck as he specifically cites his seminal work "The Nature of Doctrine."[338] He also acknowledges his indebtedness to Frei for the notion of the Bible as "realistic narrative."[339] As has been noted Newbigin draws attention to the dichotomy between the public world of facts and the private world of values and how the gospel is often forced into the private world of values. Newbigin describes Lindbeck's work as providing a third model, the cultural-linguistic model. Newbigin argues:

> "the Bible ought to function primarily as the tacit component in our endeavour to understand and deal with the world. We have to indwell the story, as we indwell the language we use and the culture of which we are a part. But since we also live within this other culture, there is necessarily an internal dialogue within us."[340]

William C. Placher has described three fundamental features of post-liberal theologians:

1. Primacy of narrative as an interpretive category
2. Hermeneutical primacy of the world created by the biblical narratives over human experience
3. Primacy of language over experience[341]

Some see the privileging of narrative as an interpretive category as a reaction to the over-emphasis on propositional truth by evangelical and fundamentalist theologians, whereas the primacy given to the biblical narrative over human experience is seen as a

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[337] Newbigin(1989e):38
[338] Lindbeck(1984)
[339] Newbigin(1986c):59 & Newbigin(1995i):72
[340] Newbigin(1994c):76
[341] quoted in McGrath(1996):23

reaction to traditional liberalism.[342] The primacy of language over experience seeks to take into account developments in linguistic philosophy such that experience is mediated through language and experience is understood through a linguistic interpretational grid. Significant experiences are distinguished from insignificant ones due to the formation of a conceptual framework instilled in the individual by the language game of the community. Thus according to Lindbeck the Christian faith becomes a linguistic system for "constituting reality, expressing experience, and ordering life."[343] The net result is that theology is seen as the grammar for the Christian faith, a purely internal discipline seeking to bring introspective order. George Hunsinger helpfully differentiates between liberalism, neo-liberalism and post-liberalism. Both liberalism and neo-liberalism relativise a "doctrine's propositional content"[344] but do so through different means. Liberalism seeks to reinterpret truth claims through the "experiential-expressive" approach to epistemology while neo-liberalism operates using a pragmatic approach to truth. Regardless of their different epistemologies both neo-liberalism and liberalism share the same aversion to propositional truth and are therefore operating under the same theological paradigm. Hunsinger contends that Frei first coined the term post-liberal in an analysis of Barth's theology when Frei noted a post-liberal phase in Barth marked by "a theory of truth determined by critical realism, a theory of doctrine marked by divine primacy and a theory of religion determined by Christocentrism."[345] Hunsinger argues that Frei's theological project is directly post-liberal, but that Lindbeck is more properly neo-liberal. Despite both Frei and Lindbeck relying on anti-foundationalist epistemology and being influenced by Wittgenstein, Frei held to a "moderate propostionalism" whereas Lindbeck holds to a mostly pragmatic

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[342] Murphy(1996)
[343] Lindbeck(1984):47-48
[344] Hunsinger(2003):45
[345] Hunsinger(2003):45

approach to truth. Bringing Placher's and Hunsinger's definitions into concert the fundamental values of postliberalism are:

- Primacy of narrative as an interpretive category
- Hermeneutical primacy of the world created by the biblical narratives over Human experience
- Critical realist epistemology
- Divine primacy in doctrinal formation
- Christocentrism
- Primacy of language over experience[346]

Hunsinger, a key spokesman for the post-liberal movement, labels Newbigin as a post-liberal missiologist.[347] Newbigin's approach converges with the post-liberal project on the first five points but diverges strongly on the sixth point relating to the primacy of language over experience. In "Truth and Authority in Modernity" he notes:

> "When the word narrative is used in theological discourse, it is sometimes with the implication that the historical truth of the narrative is not important… It is of the essence of the Christian faith that this story is the true story… [The gospels] are different human perceptions of the things that really happened."[348]

This is one of the key points of disagreement between evangelicals and post-liberals. Evangelicals have often criticised post-liberalism as being self-referential and fideistic. By describing theology as the grammar of the Christian community, there is a sense in which theology does not connect with the wider world, only the intra-church world. Indeed Garret Green argues that Lindbeck's thesis is flawed:

> "to claim that Christian believers… act as if they live in a world created by God and redeemed by Jesus is to beg the crucial question. Surely most Christians, both pre- and postcritical, understand themselves to be making assertions about reality, about the way things are, whether or not they can supply a second-order theory to justify that intent. They may be right or wrong in what they assert about reality, but it misrepresents their intent to describe them as producing fictions, 'useful' or otherwise… not 'as if' but 'as' they key to the logic of religious belief."[349]

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[346] cited in Lindbeck(1984):23
[347] Hunsinger(2003e):57
[348] Newbigin(1996b):40
[349] Green.G. (1987) "The Bible as… : Fictional narrative and Scriptural Truth." in G.Green (ed.) (1987) *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation.* Philadelphia: Fortress:88 cited in Patterson(1999):43-44

Newbigin can see the importance of both the post-liberal approach to theology as grammar and also the evangelical insistence of the actuality of the historical events described in the biblical narrative. Newbigin's appropriation of Polanyi's tacit fiduciary framework runs in parallel to Lindbeck's conception of doctrine as grammar. Both Lindbeck and Newbigin see theology in some sense as a second-order discipline that mediates reality, however Newbigin is insistent that the events described in the biblical narrative actually took place. This would seem to be a tension between Newbigin's coherentist epistemology and his critical but realistic approach to history. The narrative approach is fundamentally anti-foundationalist as it borrows a coherentist strategy for epistemic justification; the criticism of incommensurability of worldview that is levelled at the coherentist position is therefore appropriate for the post-liberal narrative theologians. Is Newbigin's approach internally inconsistent? Can an anti-foundationalist narrative based on coherentism be squared with a realistic approach to history? Newbigin's commitment to tacit fiduciary frameworks as second-order tools that can help probe reality still holds that there is a reality to be probed but that there is no immediate access to this reality. Newbigin's commitment to the actuality of historical events is nuanced by his willingness to adopt Carr's interpretive approach to history such that there is a critical yet constructive dialogue occurring between historical reality and the historiographer. Newbigin does not pretend to have immediate access to historical events but is still adamant of the reality of the events themselves. Thus Newbigin's historical realism is not naïve realism, but closer to what can be described as critical realism. Newbigin's coherentism is not simply an internal discipline as Lindbeck's grammatical understanding of theology seems to lead to. Newbigin is concerned with describing reality, made viable by his adoption of Polanyi's concept of "universal intent." Whilst the tacit fiduciary framework is self-consciously personal and contextual, universal intent is an attempt for a locally generated theory to be exposed to

the global critical community and for it to gain universal acceptance not through coercion. Polanyi's "conquer or die" dictum applies to the winsomeness of a theory to the global community; not its hegemonic brutalising of other opinions but its ability to withstand criticism and persuade others.

2.6g Apologetic resources

The narrative approach to biblical hermeneutics offers many resources for a theology of evangelism for a late-modern context. N.T. Wright in his 1989 Laing Lecture offered a helpful analogy of how the gospel story can be authoritative.[350] Wright argues that, due to evangelical inability to resolve the nature of narrative authority, misconceptions regarding the nature of scripture's authority have arisen. Wright argues that evangelicalism approached the Bible in a way that inferred that, "God has… given us the wrong sort of book and it is our job to turn it into the right sort of book,"[351] which is a repository of abstract theological creeds and treatises. Wright proposes a model for taking seriously biblical narratives using the following illustration. Suppose a Shakespeare play exists with a lost fifth act. The key parts are given to highly experienced Shakespearean actors who "immerse themselves in the first four acts and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, *and…then… work out a fifth act for themselves.*"[352] Thus the first four acts are the authority for the extrapolated fifth act. Wright argues that the Bible is the first four acts of God's work: "1 Creation; 2 Fall; 3 Israel; 4 Jesus… the New Testament forms the first scene in the fifth act, giving hints… of how the play is supposed to finish."[353] Scripture's function is to provide the characterisation necessary for God's people to play out their role. This dynamic view of scriptural authority offers resources for developing a narrative apologetic. As Wright states, "Throw a rule book at people's heads, or offer them a list of doctrines, and they

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[350] Wright(1991)
[351] Wright(1991):13
[352] Wright(1991):18
[353] Wright(1991):19

can duck or avoid it… Tell them a story… and you invite them to share a worldview."[354] Some argue that stories too can be avoided by dismissing them simply as myths or limiting them to the personal sphere. But stories provide an excellent resource for challenging the worldview of the hearer: once heard, stories provide not just simple assertions but a whole network of ideas, values and propositions that must be evaluated as a whole. This evaluation is non-confrontational and yet subversive of the hearer's interpretative framework. The authority of a story is to a large extent internal and therefore prior epistemological justification is unnecessary. In light of this, Abraham calls for the rediscovery of "narrative, allegory, drama, fantasy, poetry and the like… [as] important in the articulation of the Christian faith and in opening up the heart and mind to the depth and simplicity of the gospel." [355] Wright argues that stories challenge worldviews not simply because of their textual or dramatic existence, but because of the community that lives them out. The link between narrative and community will become more apparent in chapter four.

For all Newbigin's rhetoric of using story to present the gospel, he sees this occurring not primarily in preaching and verbal evangelism but rather in the living out of the story by the church. In fact it is rare to find narrative in Newbigin's writings; for example in his commentary on John's gospel his method is exegesis: he translates the gospel narrative into purely propositional statements. Newbigin does not provide many examples of using the gospel narrative to communicate the gospel verbally. However, Newbigin does provide the theoretical framework of using narrative to challenge the reigning metanarratives of late-modernity and he also provides theological and theoretical evidence for the indispensability of a believing community incarnating the gospel story, which is a topic we shall turn to shortly.

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[354] Wright(1991):22
[355] Abraham (1995):275

2.6h Implications

The rediscovery of the importance of narrative for the interpretation of the whole of scripture but particularly for the gospel is highly significant for evangelism in late-modern cultures. Narrative is a highly effective medium for communicating the gospel because it addresses the listener simultaneously at an intellectual, emotional and volitional level. Newbigin's approach does not mean that purely propositional statements of fact are precluded: Newbigin's commitment to the historical veracity of the gospel events is evidence of this. Newbigin's approach helps redress the balance between purely propositional statements and narrative. Purely propositional statements of the gospel often failed to penetrate the scepticism of the listeners, or engage emotionally with the audience. Narrative presentations of the gospel apart from being faithful to the biblical norm for gospel articulation are helpful for two main reasons.

Cross-cultural and inter-generational translatability

As western cultures become increasingly plural, narrative apologetics provide an important resource for cross-cultural and inter-generational evangelism. Stories bridge cultural and generational barriers constructing their own narrative worlds and providing a third place in which meaning can be encountered. Entering the narrative world involves cross-cultural communication skills from both the speaker and the receiver. The speaker must tell the story with sensitivity to the cultural location of the hearers, but the hearers are involved in a cross-cultural process as they leave their own cultures to enter the constructed culture of the narrative world.

Emotional engagement

Stories draw the listeners into the narrative world and create affinities between the listener and the protagonists in the story. This is an emotional engagement and when the gospel is presented in a narrative framework a significant advantage is gained over a propositional presentation of the gospel which can tend to engage the intellect alone and

arouse suspicion. There is a sense in which a relationship between the listener and the protagonist in the story is started which seems wholly appropriate as the purpose of evangelism is to invite people into relationship with God in Christ.

2.7 The gospel: invitational revelation

Linked with the claim that the gospel is true, historical and particular is the authority and finality of the gospel. Newbigin often answers the question why should anyone believe his retelling of the gospel story in the following way:

> "I have been called and commissioned, through no merit of mine, to carry this message, to tell this story, to give this invitation. It is not my story or my invitation. It has no coercive intent. It is an invitation from the one who loved you and gave himself up for you. That invitation will come with winsomeness if it comes from a community in which the grace of the Redeemer is at work"[356]

There are three important elements to be explored here, election, invitation, and response.

2.7a Election and the reception of the gospel

For Newbigin there is a gathering point in his apologetic theory: election. Hunsberger recounts his experience when Newbigin is pushed on his apologetic approach.

> "When it seemed he had taken his line of argument clear to the bottom, to the most fundamental grounding point upon which his argument, his apologetic, his logic rested – his most basic axiom, as he might say – he said something like, 'at this point we must resort to the biblical doctrine of election.'"[357]

Thus when asked for the authority by which an evangelist delivers a message, the messenger can only recount their own experience of being called and commissioned by God through the gospel story as the grounds by which to dare to communicate it to another. God's electing purpose, the effectual call that comes through the gospel story to create faith in the believer, is a basic presupposition in Newbigin's apologetic approach. Newbigin is not proposing an anti-intellectual approach to evangelism, but in

[356] Newbigin(1996b):82
[357] Hunsberger(1998):2

the end seeks to hold in tension divine sovereignty in election and human freedom in response. This is how Newbigin overcomes the problem of the effects of sin on human cognition and also how he preserves divine sovereignty over revelation.

2.7b The gospel as invitation

Newbigin takes the concept of revelation on from both a propositional level and also a narrative dimension when he writes that:

> "The revelation of which we speak in the Christian tradition is more than the communication of information; it is the giving of an invitation. It is more than the unfolding of the purpose, which was otherwise hidden in the mind of God… it is also a summons, a call, an invitation."[358]

Communication is always more than the passing on of information; there is always a communicative purpose. The communication theorist David Berlo states "our basic purpose in communication is to become an affecting agent... *we communicate to influence*."[359] Speech-act theory identifies that speech is always an action. Every communicative act has an authorial intention, including therefore the gospel. Newbigin describes the gospel as God's invitation to fellowship and the evangelist the bearer of an invitation from God to the listener, with the authority coming from the author who authorised the invitation. J.L. Austin describes a triad of concepts in language. Locution is the utterance of words; illocution is what is actually done in uttering the words and perlocution is that which is brought about uttering the words. For example the locutionary act of saying "Hello" accomplishes the illocutionary event of greeting someone with the perlocutionary effect of making them welcome. In the Genesis account of creation God's locutionary act "Let there be..." has the illocutionary significance of exercising authority and the perlocutionary effect of creating the Universe. This approach to language works on the assumption that language is demonstrably performative. Thus the gospel "is not only a 'locutionary' act, conveying

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[358] Newbigin(1995i):65 & Newbigin(1996b):82
[359] Berlo(1960):11-12

information, but an 'illucutionary' act, calling forth some specific response from the hearer/reader."[360]

Central to this idea is that God the "speaker is a doer."[361] God's spoken words achieve his purposes, they are performative utterances. This is also affirmed in Isaiah where God states that, "my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."[362] God's word is not portrayed as a rogue entity that has independent existence; instead it is seen as God's agent accomplishing his purposes. Newbigin correctly identifies the perlocutory purpose of the gospel as an invitation to fellowship with God, which should be conveyed in all faithful gospel communication. The authority for the invitation comes from God as the inviter. After citing John's vision of Christ in Revelation[363] Newbigin writes that

> "if you are in the presence of one who was dead and is alive and has the keys of death and Hades, the question of authority is answered… When all argument is ended there remains a fact, the total fact of Jesus Christ, who requires no authority to commend him, but who places every man in the position where an answer has to be given one way or the other to the question that he asks. That fact is the authority for Christian mission. If we are asked for our credentials, we can only answer: "in the name of Jesus.""[364]

Newbigin asserts that God's communication to humanity is not a "series of propositions imposed by an alien power on the mind of man, invading and limiting the proper autonomy of his reason and conscience; we are speaking of the appeal of a personal love which seeks not to coerce submission but to evoke love."[365]

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[360] Vanhoozer(1998):209
[361] Vanhoozer(1998):209
[362] Isaiah 55:11-12
[363] Revelation 1:12-18
[364] Newbigin(1961b):60
[365] Newbigin(1984a):16

2.7c The gospel invitation demands a response

This approach to revelation also means that the gospel message demands a response, not in a coercive manner, but in the sense that every invitation is either accepted or denied. The gospel is an invitation to fellowship with the person of Christ who has been revealed through the telling of the gospel story. In fact as the gospel story is proclaimed a form of relationship between the listener and Christ, the central character of the story, is established as the story draws the listener into its narrative world. Thus the gospel is more than a passing on of information in narrative form, the perlocutionary purpose of God through the gospel is the invitation of men and women into fellowship with himself. The gospel story also demands a response to the person of Christ that stands at the centre of the narrative who offers the invitation of fellowship. Finally Newbigin again stresses that the winsomeness of the invitation is to some extent based on the community that offers the invitation. Interestingly, Newbigin is here either stressing that the evangelist is indissolubly linked to a community of faith or that the invitation is being offered in the context of the community. This is further evidence of Newbigin's commitment to the local church as the primary context for evangelism.

2.8 The gospel: contextual revelation

As has been noted Newbigin shows very little contextual awareness in his 1942 presentation "What is the Gospel?" Equally Newbigin's presentation of the gospel in an Indian context does not seem to have any noticeable distinction from a presentation in a European context. In "Christ our Eternal Contemporary" and "Journey in Joy" very few of Newbigin's illustrations relate to the Indian context. Indeed one commentator has noted regarding: "his Bangalore lectures of 1941, in which some fifty pages of text contains less than two-thirds of a page of reference to the Indian context in which they

were being delivered- and that to dismiss the Indian notion of history as cyclical."[366] Despite this lack of contextual awareness in Newbigin's early writings the whole area of contextualisation was seen to be one of the strengths of Newbigin's later evangelistic approach, in fact it led Hunsberger to state that "perhaps more than anyone, Newbigin has grappled theologically with the issues of gospel and culture."[367] Newbigin's model of contextualisation is best examined in the next chapter when the cultural corner of Newbigin's triangular model of missionary communication is explored. But what is pertinent is that for Newbigin there is always a profound relationship between the gospel and cultural context, Newbigin writes:

> "Neither at the beginning, nor at any subsequent time, is there or can there be a gospel that is not embodied in a culturally conditioned form of words. The idea that one can or could at any time separate out by some process of distillation a pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretions is an illusion."[368]

Thus for Newbigin there is no such thing as a disembodied gospel; the gospel was first proclaimed in the cultural context of first century Palestine within the wider context of the Old Testament scriptures and must now be (re)contextualised in late-modern cultures. As shall be shown for Newbigin the best context for the gospel to be heard is that of the congregation, it is the "body of believers which must – in the end – be the instrument of contextualisation for the gospel."[369] It is important to note the development of Newbigin's thought from a contextually naïve presentation of the gospel in 1942 to a sophisticated articulation of the complexities of relating gospel, congregation and cultures. Newbigin outlines the contextualisation process in three stages noting:

> "The communication has to be in the language of the receptor culture. It has to be such that it accepts, at least provisionally, the way of understanding things that is embodied in that language…

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[366] Robinson(2002):303
[367] Hunsberger(1996a):8
[368] Newbigin(1986c):4
[369] Newbigin(1978b):312

> However, if it is truly the communication of the gospel, it will call radically into question that way of understanding embodied in the language it uses. If it is truly revelation, it will involve contradiction, and call for conversion…
> This radical conversion can never be the achievement of human persuasion… it can only be the work of God."[370]

2.9 The gospel: eschatological revelation

The sixth point in Newbigin's 1942 exposition of Peter's Pentecost sermon is that the gospel is "A statement about the new powers that follow."[371] According to Peter, and Newbigin's whole theological project, the coming of the Holy Spirit is primarily an eschatological event, the sign of the new age breaking into the present. This theme recurs in Newbigin's writing such that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the individual and the church is his most frequent agenda in discussing eschatology. The marks of this new age that are the foretaste of the eschatological age that Newbigin mentions are threefold: freedom, good works and fellowship.

2.9a Freedom

Newbigin was aware of the western pre-occupation with freedom and indeed his first published book was "Christian Freedom in the Modern World,"[372] which was written eight years before "What is the Gospel?" Exegetically it is hard to see why Newbigin argued for freedom as a major outworking of the Pentecost event. But remembering Newbigin's predilection for Johanine theology, Newbigin could have sought exegetical support for this notion from John's pneumatology which emphasises freedom as an outworking of the gift of the Spirit.[373]

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[370] Newbigin(1986c):4-5
[371] Newbigin(1942):3
[372] Newbigin(1937)
[373] John3:5-8

2.9b Good works

This aspect is difficult to justify from the Pentecost context, but Newbigin's wider work provides the framework from which the good works produced by the Spirit allows the church to function eschatologically as the foretaste of God's coming kingdom.

2.9c Fellowship

According to Newbigin the primary result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a "new kind of fellowship."[374] This fits with the context of Peter's sermon and again is a major facet in Newbigin's mature theology. Newbigin argues that the fellowship that is released

> "from the burdern of estrangement from God brought release from mutual estrangement also… such a fellowship is the distinctive fruit of the Holy Spirit as it is also the highest end of human life; and such a fellowship is what the Church exists to realise on earth."[375]

For Newbigin the existence of the church is evidence of supernatural sociology wrought by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. The quality of fellowship within congregations functions as an eschatological sign of the coming kingdom of God. This is extremely important for Newbigin's theology of evangelism and will be explored in detail in chapter four.

2.9d Revelation and eschatology

Eschatology remains an important aspect of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation throughout his writings. Newbigin follows the biblical theme of final eschatological epistemic vindication for belief[376] when he writes that the Cartesian quest for certainty is flawed because "final certainty belongs to the day of judgement."[377] He also uses an eschatological argument to help explain the logic of revelation. As has been shown

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[374] Newbigin(1942):17
[375] Newbigin(1942):18
[376] 1 Peter 1:7
[377] Newbigin(1996c):54

Newbigin argues that the gospel is a revelation of universal history, but the problem is "How then can we, who are still in the middle of the cosmic story, know what the point of that story is, or whether it has any point at all? Only if the author of the story has let us into the secret while we are still in the middle."[378] Newbigin argues that life can only be lived with a sense of purpose with the knowledge of the purpose of the universe, which can only be made known by revelation. It is the future that gives meaning to the present; indeed Newbigin argues: "The human spirit cannot live permanently with the form of rationality which has no answer to the question 'why?'"[379]

2.10 The Gospel: communal revelation

As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter Newbigin's doctrine of revelation is indissolubly connected with his doctrine of election and his ecclesiology. This stream of thought has been present since the earliest point in Newbigin's theological writing. In the 36-page essay written in 1936 for his theological studies at Westminster College, the threefold connection between revelation, election and ecclesiology is clearly present in Newbigin's doctrine of revelation. These themes remained central to Newbigin's theology and it is genuinely surprising how little the central thrust of Newbigin's theology changed over time. Despite Hunsberger's contention that there are three phases of development in Newbigin's theology Newbigin remains consistently faithful to the theological project he embarked on in 1936. The central thrust of the essay is set out in its opening paragraphs and due to the fact that this essay still remains unpublished it is worth quoting at length:

> "In a preliminary discussion of the subject we may fairly say that the central importance ascribed to revelation in Christianity depends on two beliefs about the nature of the world and of man. Firstly the belief that the meaning of the world is personal. For if the final meaning of the world is less than personal, then it is best understood by those methods of scepticism and experiment which are requisites of scientific enquiry, but which would be the complete destruction of any personal understanding. For we know a person only as he chooses to

[378] Newbigin(1989e):91
[379] Newbigin(1989e):213

reveal himself, and only as our own spirit is sensitive and trustful to respond to his revelation, and if the meaning of the world is personal then revelation is the only path by which it can be made known to us. Secondly the belief that the meaning of a man's life is in fellowship: if it were otherwise, we should not only expect that every man would be able to achieve for himself, apart from co-operation with his fellows, the necessities of physical existence and culture, and that pain and pleasure would always be distributed in mathematical accordance with sin and merit; but also that every man would be able to receive by direct revelation from God – apart from human telling – the knowledge necessary for blessedness. But if it be true that man was made for fellowship then we can understand not only the meaning of the co-operation which economic facts make necessary, and the strange incidence of pain and pleasure; so monstrously unjust by the standards of the law courts; but we can also understand the immensely significant fact that revelation which is the key to our highest blessedness does not descend to us straight from heaven, but has to reach us passed from hand to hand of our fellow men along the chain of historic community. It is to be noted that both of these beliefs are essential elements in the Christian view of revelation; the first without the second would make way for an individualistic mysticism very remote from the genius of Christianity; while the second without the first – a belief in human solidarity apart from a personal interpretation of the world – is perfectly comparable with that tyranny of second-hand information which is the characteristic of the age called scientific."[380]

The gospel thus forms the community, the gospel story is the medium through which the invitation of God is offered to humanity and this story is incarnated by the community that was formed by this gospel invitation. The gospel story sustains the community it forms, providing its metanarrative equipping the congregation to live out its faith claims even in a hostile environment. The congregation itself becomes "part of the gospel"[381], its very existence demonstrating the reality of God's reconciling work as people from once hostile races are united in its body. Newbigin explains his understanding of the evangelistic significance of the congregation in his preface to "Sin and Salvation".

"the crucial question is how salvation becomes ours? When I came to write that chapter I found that I had to make a decision about the order of the sections. In the tradition in which I was brought up it would be normal to begin with a section on 'Faith' and work through to a (probably brief) concluding section on the Church. After a good deal of reflection I decided to reverse the order… as it is the order which the non-Christian has to follow when he comes to Christ. What he sees is a visible congregation which hold out to him the offer of

[380] Newbigin(1935):1-2
[381] Newbigin(1958):26

> salvation. Only when he has come within its fellowship does he (usually) come to any deep understanding of its inner source."[382]

Thus it is clear that for Newbigin's theology of evangelism the congregation's role is so pervasive and sustained that it warrants separate consideration and thus this theme will be expanded on in chapter four.

2.11 Summary

Newbigin's understanding of the gospel matured and developed over his long theological career. Nevertheless many of the insights present in his earliest articulations of the gospel remained constant. Newbigin remained Christocentric in his gospel but still encouraged a Trinitarian breadth to his evangelism. Newbigin's gospel was also crucio-centric with a heavy emphasis on the atonement. Epistemologically Newbigin understood that the gospel could not fit into any system of which it was not the starting point and so the gospel in general and the resurrection in particular functioned as the basis of Newbigin's own coherentist approach to epistemological justification. Despite the heavy epistemological function that the gospel provided for Newbigin's project, he continued to defend the historicity and actuality of the gospel events. This meant that Newbigin remained committed to the particularity of the gospel which led him to use the doctrine of election, perhaps uniquely, as a significant part of his apologetic. There is some uncertainty as to what Newbigin understood in terms of the extent of salvation but his soteriology remained holistic avoiding the dangers of both a materialism that focussed only on this-wordly material and economic development and an other-wordly approach that sees the soul as primary aspect of human identity. Newbigin utilises the insights of narrative theologians to recapture the gospel as story and the apologetic opportunities this provides for evangelism. Newbigin provides much-needed encouragement to Christians struggling with the issue of the authority by which they

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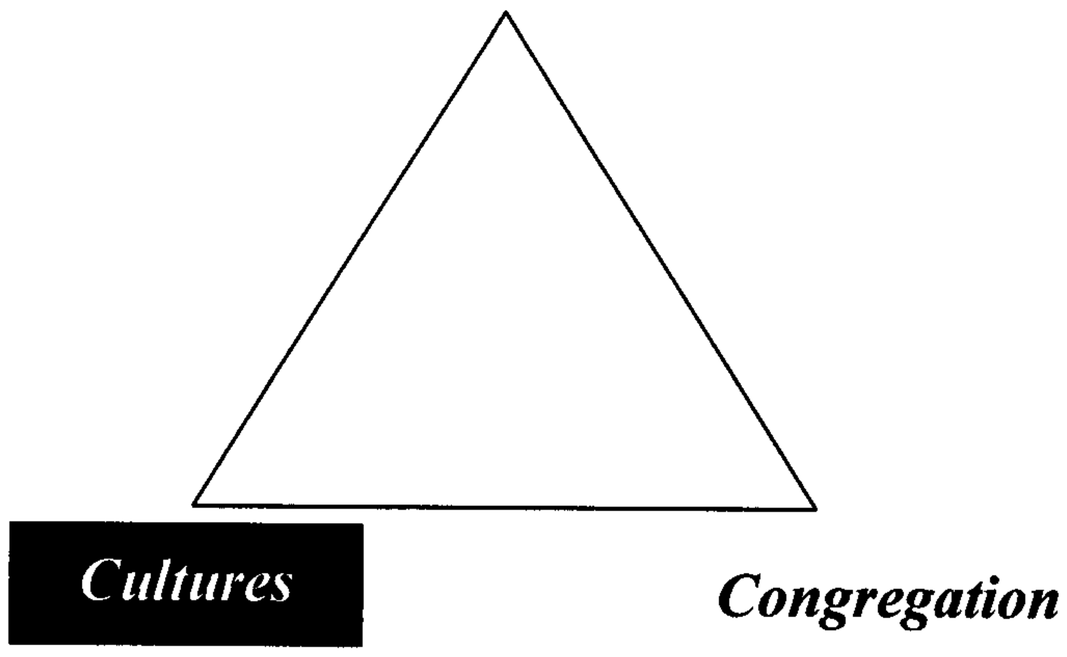
[382] Newbigin(1956):9

dare to tell others what to believe in cultures that sees truth-claims as power-claims, by describing the gospel as an invitation and the evangelist as mediator or messenger. Newbigin's articulation of the gospel is strongly eschatological and therefore final epistemic vindication is in the future but Newbigin also stressed the need for current demonstrations of the authenticity of the gospel message through a transformed and transforming community.

Chapter 3

THE GOSPEL AND CULTURES

- Newbigin's doctrine of general revelation and late-modern evangelism



3.1 Importance of cultures for Newbigin's missiology

Newbigin's major insights into evangelism in late-modern contexts came as the result of the culture-shock that he experienced at the age of sixty-five returning to the United Kingdom from India. It is therefore unsurprising that Newbigin gives a great deal of attention in his later writings to the interaction between the gospel and cultures. Newbigin argues persuasively using the example of Peter's first sermon to gentiles in Cornelius' house[383] that the relationship between gospel and cultures is a dialogical relationship such that the cultural context into which the gospel is being (re)contextualised can assist the church in its understanding and articulation of the gospel itself.

George Hunsberger's doctoral thesis "Bearing the Witness of the Spirit"[384] argues that Newbigin's major contribution to missiology is his approach to "cultural plurality". By this Hunsberger means Newbigin's "understanding of the significance of the plurality of

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[383] Newbigin(1995h):64
[384] Hunsberger(1998)

diverse cultures present in and among the societies of the world."[385] This leads Newbigin to a strong commitment to encouraging a variety of cultural expressions of the Christian faith rather than to a monolithic global Christian culture. Newbigin's commitment to cultural diversity demonstrates important theological assumptions as to the nature of the relationship between divine revelation and human cultures.

This chapter will proceed firstly by seeking to elucidate Newbigin's conception of culture in general and particularly his approach to late-modern cultures. This will be undertaken by attending to Howard Netland's, Stephen Williams' and Steven Bevans' criticisms of Newbigin's approach to cultures which will be followed by a critique of Newbigin's approach to multiculturalism.

Secondly Newbigin's doctrine of general revelation will be examined in order to better understand the relationship between divine revelation and human cultures. General revelation provides resources for a theology of evangelism particularly regarding questions as to whether there are any God-given resources available in each culture to assist gospel communication. Newbigin's articulation of the doctrine of general revelation will be examined in light of the historical antecedents of his reformed position. Thirdly and more briefly Newbigin's perspective on the possibility of revelation in non-Christian religions will be analysed.

3.2 Newbigin's theory of culture

At first sight Newbigin provides a non-technical approach to culture as his most commonly used definition of culture is:

> "the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings and handed down from one generation to another."[386]

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[385] Hunsberger(1998):9
[386] Newbigin(1986c):3 and Newbigin(1995h):142

As Newbigin admits to Hunsberger his definition is taken directly from the 'Random House Dictionary.'[387] In fact in 1985 Newbigin admits to having done no significant reading in the field of cultural anthropology. He does however trace to 1867 the first use of the word "culture" in the English language to refer to "the things that a society holds in common."[388] Hunsberger notes that when Newbigin uses this definition he supplements it with a more sophisticated fourfold stress on:

- Culture as "a product of human initiative, not an unchangeable datum"
- Culture as "a social" product
- Culture as always in "transmission"
- Culture as comprising of the "vast variety of human ways of living" including "all that of which constitutes man's public life in society"[389]

These features of Newbigin's approach to cultures are at one level a major step forward from other attempts in Newbigin's era to engage the gospel and cultures. Particularly significant is Newbigin's awareness of the dynamic nature of cultures. Newbigin writes: "all the elements of a culture, even in the most stable communities, are changing"[390] and that even within a culture there will be multifaceted approaches to this culture as "in every community there are conservatives and there are reformers… the danger in all programs for "indigenization"… of the gospel is that they involve the church with the conservative and backward looking elements in society."[391] Hunsberger notes that Newbigin's approach to cultures radically challenged Neibuhr's "Christ and Culture"[392], the classic text on the relationship on the gospel and culture, which had a more static view of culture.

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[387] Hunsberger(1998):13
[388] Newbigin(1995i):31
[389] Newbigin(1978):13
[390] Newbigin(1995h):144
[391] Newbigin(1995h):144
[392] Niebuhr(1952)

These four aspects owe a great deal to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman's work "The Social Construction of Reality"[393] which emphasises culture as a human social product. Berger and Luckman observe that cultures exist "as both objective and subjective reality"[394]: subjective as they are human products created by society and yet also objective as they produce cultural artefacts which then provide a cultural environment that affect human life and thought. Clifford Geertz gives a powerful illustration when he argues that:

> "the concept of culture I espouse… is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun."[395]

Newbigin's approach finds some correspondence with the "Symbolic/Semiotic Anthropology"[396] adopted by, amongst others, Geertz, Mary Douglas and Victor Turner.[397] For example Newbigin's concept of culture follows Geertz's semiotic interpretation when he writes about the centrality of human language to cultures stating "the language of a people provides the means by which they express their way of perceiving things and coping with them."[398] Newbigin also alludes to the important role that religious belief plays in the forming of cultures particularly in shaping the "set of beliefs, experiences, and practices that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which give shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty."[399]

Up until this point it seems that Newbigin's understanding of culture is entirely anthropological and sociological as there has been no theological dimension to his articulation of the concept of culture. However an important insight into Newbigin's theological engagement with cultures is found in his analysis of the Apostle Paul's use

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[393] Berger & Luckman(1967)
[394] Berger & Luckman(1967):149
[395] Geertz(1993):5
[396] Luzbetak(1993):154
[397] Hunsberger(1998):12
[398] Newbigin(1986c):3
[399] Newbigin(1986c):3

of the term "powers." Newbigin writes: "if we are to grasp theologically the meaning of the 'sum total ways of living'… I think we must do so by means of Paul's doctrine of the powers."[400] Newbigin goes on to note that the powers are referred to by Paul both positively and negatively; positively in that they were created by Christ and for him, and negatively in that they have been disarmed on the cross.[401] The powers were created by a loving God but they have some sort of independence from God such that "they must serve the purpose of Christ, and they are open to challenge by those who are in Christ."[402] Putting aside questions such as the degree to which Newbigin is dependent on Walter Wink's[403] interpretation of the powers and thus the extent to which Newbigin has demythologised the powers, the analogy between the powers and cultures that Newbigin employs is significant. Firstly there is an almost deistic assumption in Newbigin's approach; the powers, like cultures, were created by and for Christ providing the framework by which human life is possible, but the idea that Christ continually sustains them or the Father reveals himself through cultures is missing as is the idea that the Spirit could be working through cultures. Most significantly the idea that in all cultures God has revealed himself through general revelation is also absent. Newbigin is not alone in this: Louis Luzbetak in his important work "The Church and Cultures" [404] does not provide a theological understanding of culture and therefore does not discuss the revelatory aspects of culture apart from a brief mention of "felt needs."[405] Another seminal text for missionary engagement with cultures is Charles Kraft's "Anthropology for Christian Witness" which in 486 pages gives only one mention of God's revelatory work in a culture when he cites Don Richardson's "Eternity in their Hearts" and then concludes

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[400] Newbigin(1995h):142
[401] Newbigin(1995h):143
[402] Newbigin(1995h):143
[403] Wink(1987)
[404] Luzbetak(1993)
[405] Luzbetak(1993):162-163

> "cross-cultural witnesses need to look for such indications of God's prior working in whatever societies they go to and work in continuity with them."[406]

There appears to be a major lack of theological reflection on the nature of culture in missiological writings. In order to see Newbigin's theology of cultures in practice, and to help further engagement with late-modern cultures his evaluation of contemporary western cultures must be analysed.

3.2a Newbigin's praxis of cultural critique

Newbigin argues that

> "[i]n spite of its erosion by the growing movement of 'deconstruction' among intellectuals in the 'developed' societies, modernism is still the major challenge which the world faces, primarily because it is embodied in the global economic-financial-industrial system which is now more powerful than even the most powerful nation-states and which is rapidly engulfing traditional societies and their 'autonomous economies' into mindless operations."[407]

This citation offers several clues to assess Newbigin's evaluation of the cultural context in which he wrote. Newbigin refers most frequently to his context as "modernity" although Newbigin does use the term postmodernity on a few occasions.[408] Newbigin argues that although his engagement has primarily been with modernity it is "still in spite of the post-modernists, the dominant power in public debate."[409] Firstly, Newbigin's approach to modernity fits well with the reflexive model of modernity cited earlier and therefore his engagement with modernity is a self-conscious engagement with "modernity turned in on itself", what this thesis refers to as 'late-modernity.' Secondly Newbigin relates the dominance of modernity to its infiltration into the global economic system. There is a hint here of Newbigin's indebtedness to Fredric Jameson's work "Post-modernism: the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"[410] and the globalization

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[406] Kraft(1996):233
[407] Newbigin(1996a):8
[408] Newbigin(1993g):227 & (1996c):7
[409] Newbigin(1992e):6
[410] Jameson(1991)

thesis. Andrew Walker drawing on the work of the renowned sociologist Zygmunt Bauman offers another perspective on modernity and global economics when he writes that:

> "modernity is not the modernization programme of western capitalism, but modernisation itself, whether in its capitalist or collectivist guise. For Bauman… the collapse of Communism can be interpreted as the beginning of the end of modernity. This is because collectivist socialism has in many ways been more deeply committed to planned, rational and technological modernisation than western democracies. If such centrally-planned rationalisation could not flourish, then for Bauman, modernity itself is virtually over."[411]

Newbigin's approach to cultural engagement can best be explored by examining the validity of the critique made on his work by three theologians who in different ways have challenged his reading of culture in general and modernity in particular: Howard Netland, Stephen Williams and Stephen Bevans.

3.2b Netland's critique: oversimplified and inaccurate approach to modernity

Netland published his work on religious pluralism "Dissonant Voices" in 1991. In it he begins a critique of Newbigin's epistemology which he describes as "theological fideism."[412] Netland was invited to expand on his critique of Newbigin's position at the Uppsala conference of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation in 1993. Netland writes of this incident:

> "I'm not sure that everyone present understood that this had been my assignment, so I think that I appeared to some (many?) to be in rather bad taste in launching a critique of so distinguished a missiologist, in his presence!"[413]

There was brief oral interaction between Netland and Newbigin during the conference during question-time provided after sessions, but there was never a full correspondence. Nevertheless the debate continues in Netland's writings. Interestingly Netland concludes:

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[411] Walker(1996):139
[412] Netland(1991):178
[413] Netland personal correspondence received 17/9/2002

> "I feel so even more now after having read most of his writings on the subject, that we were talking past each other. I'm not sure he really understood what I was saying, and I must say that I am not sure that I really understand what he was saying!"[414]

Netland's primary criticisms of Newbigin were firstly that Newbigin equates modernity with the Enlightenment leading to a reductionist approach to the Enlightenment and secondly that Newbigin misreads the transition from modernity to postmodernity. These areas of criticism will be examined in turn.

Netland acknowledges that "no-one has done more to focus the attention of evangelicals on the impact of the Enlightenment upon modern western culture than the late missiologist and theologian Lesslie Newbigin."[415] Yet Netland challenges Newbigin's understanding of the Enlightenment, stating that for Newbigin "one of the most pernicious influences of the Enlightenment is the modern demand for absolute certainty in all areas of knowledge, including religion, an unattainable idea that he traces back to the dominant influence of Rene Descartes."[416] Netland's summary is accurate as under Polanyi's influence this is Newbigin's primary criticism of the Enlightenment. Netland criticises Newbigin of oversimplification:

> "to identify modernity with the Enlightenment and in particular to understand western culture as defined by René Descartes' agenda and assumptions, is both historically misleading and inadequate."[417]

Netland argues that Newbigin's thesis fails to take into consideration "the intellectual and social movements of the time"[418] and he argues that

> "the eighteenth century Enlightenment was just one intellectual movement of the past three hundred years, and while it did exert considerable influence upon later

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[414] Netland personal correspondence received 17/9/2002
[415] Netland(2001):68
[416] Netland(2001):68
[417] Netland(2001):68
[418] Netland(2001):74

> developments, it was not the sole, nor perhaps the dominant force shaping late-twentieth century western cultures."[419]

Netland goes on to argue that "a history-of-ideas approach *by itself* is inadequate for understanding cultural change. Intellectual history alone will not explain the dynamics of popular culture where the influence of intellectuals is marginal at best."[420]

The second major criticism that Netland raises with Newbigin's cultural engagement is that Newbigin misunderstands the movement from modernity to late-modernity. Instead of seeing late-modernity as "a recent rejection of Enlightenment rationalism" as Netland accuses, he argues that late-modernity can best be accounted for "as the culmination of the social transformations brought about by modernization and the intellectual currents of the past four centuries."[421] Netland argues that the seventeenth century Cartesian rationalism that sought to provide a rationalistic foundation to metaphysics was "largely abandoned by later eighteenth century thinkers"[422] and therefore Newbigin's focus on Descartes is misplaced. Netland argues that it was a common commitment to criticism in all areas of life rather than rationalism that united Enlightenment thinkers. However Netland admits that there was under the Enlightenment

> "a sustained effort to cleanse religion of anything perceived to be contrary to reason, therefore restoring a pure, rational and natural religion common to all human kind. The "scandal of particularity"… was bitterly attacked."[423]

3.2c Response to Netland

In response to these two major criticisms of Newbigin's understanding of the Enlightenment two questions need to be asked: firstly is there any substance to Netland's criticisms and secondly how do they affect the resource provided by Newbigin's approach to evangelism.

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[419] Netland(2001):75
[420] Netland(2001):75
[421] Netland(2001):68
[422] Netland(2001):71
[423] Netland(2001):73-4

Netland himself admits that "developing comprehensive models for explaining large domains of human activity across temporal, cultural and geographical expanses is no easy task, and attempts to do so with respect to the past four hundred years of Western history face the danger of reductionism."[424] It would seem there is not only a risk of reductionism in providing these models, there is certainty as the whole enterprise of seeking to provide an overview of the history-of-ideas is by its very nature about reducing the information into a communicable format: any kind of representation involves good or bad selection of material. Newbigin due to the influence of Polanyi has focussed on the ideals of objectivity present in Cartesian rationalism and the empiricism that followed as a heuristic device to understand the history-of-ideas over the last four hundred years. Newbigin has sought to equip the church for its evangelistic task by unearthing some dominant trends and he writes in "Foolishness to the Greeks" that he has "tried in a few strokes to sketch what seem to me to be the essential features of our culture."[425]

Netland criticises Newbigin's approach for being too focussed on the history-of-ideas and thus not connecting sufficiently with wider cultural trends. This criticism raises questions of the whole project of the history-of-ideas approach to cultural criticism. The idea of a "trickle down" of ideas from high to low culture has been popular; for example the work of Schaeffer even goes so far as to diagrammatise this process.[426]

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[424] Netland(2001):56
[425] Newbigin(1986c):33
[426] Schaeffer(1990):8

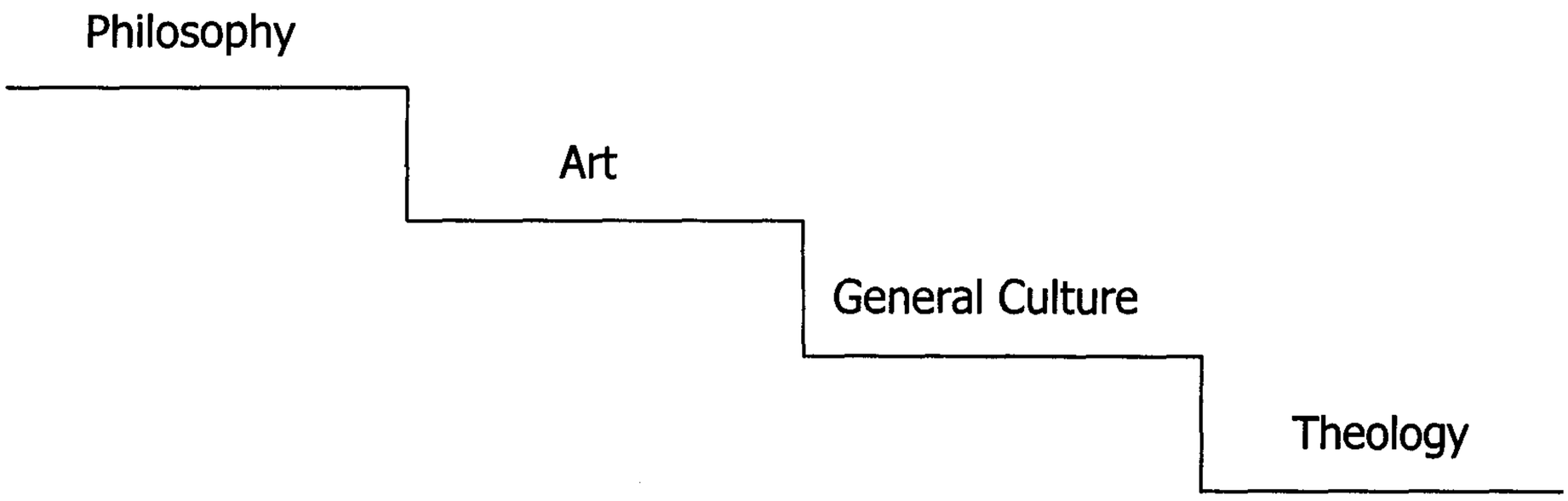

Figure 2: Schaeffer's model of the dissemination of ideas in a culture

The trickle-down model of culture gives preference to high culture as the seminal influence on cultural development which then trickles down into mass culture. This approach has been criticised by both Netland and Walker. Netland's criticism is weakened by his adoption of the history-of-ideas approach in his own work whilst Walker provides an alternative model of cultural analysis, describing how late-modernity is often viewed in terms of a social pyramid, "the cultural elites at the top dominate and determine cultural values, which in turn sprinkle down, spraying like water from a shower head on the classes below."[427] Walker suggests that even if this trickle-down model had some merit in describing classical modernity it is "certainly not adequate to describe late-modernity."[428] Walker's model is helpful as it neither denies the role of the history-of-ideas nor elevates it to the place of the primary determinative influence on a culture. Due to the conjunction of consumerism and mass culture currently cultural influence is "a multi-headed hydra of mass cultural transmission."[429] Newbigin's interaction with culture is often at the high-culture level. Newbigin engages with Descartes, Hume and Locke but Walker's approach would suggest that in a late-

[427] Walker(1996):155-7
[428] Walker(1996):157
[429] Walker(1996):158

modern context the gospel's (re)contextualisation must engage at both the high-cultural level and that of popular culture as both of these influence equally a person's perception of the plausibility of the gospel.

In his significant chapter "Profile of a Culture" in "Foolishness to the Greeks" Newbigin sketches out the salient features of what he describes as Post-Enlightenment culture. Newbigin begins by outlining the prehistory of the Enlightenment citing:

- The significance of translating Arabic texts into Latin which exposed western culture to Greek science and metaphysics and especially Aristotle's work.
- The rise of universities and the flood of classical ideas in the Renaissance
- The theological battles of the Reformation
- New developments in science by the likes of Bacon, Galileo and Newton

This list demonstrates Newbigin's awareness of social influences and not just a reliance on the history-of-ideas approach and makes Netland's criticism appear harsh. Newbigin highlights the following areas which he describes as the central elements to the new vision of the Enlightenment:

- Rejection of teleology
- Rejection of authority
- Rise of the nation state attributable to a focus on human rights.
- Rejection of eschatology and the rise of the progress
- Rise of consumerism and the autonomous market economy

It is sufficient to note once again that Newbigin is aware of a wider canvas than the history-of-ideas. He writes that

> "the manner in which the thinkers of the Enlightenment expressed their new way of understanding the world, and then at the manners in which these have been embodied in the life of modern western societies, I must repeat, I am not implying a one way, cause and effect relationship between ideas and social and industrial realities."[430]

Newbigin cites Hannah Arendt who argues that "the invention of the telescope was among the most fundamental causes of the emergence of the modern mind because it

[430] Newbigin(1986c):33

showed the world is not what it appears to be."[431] Newbigin argues that the new Enlightenment thinking was brought about through the invention of accurate navigation equipment that opened up new cultures for exploration, thus Newbigin understands the reciprocal relationship between social change and ideological change. It must be stated that Newbigin did give heavy emphasis to a history-of-ideas approach but he was self-consciously aware of other influences on cultural formation. Indeed when responding to a criticism that his reading of the Enlightenment was reductionist as it overemphasised epistemology and paid insufficient attention to "human agency", Newbigin responds:

> "I thought I had always made it clear that I accept the big element of truth in this. It has been one of my main, too often repeated, affirmations that the idea of a disembodied rationality is an illusion; that all human rational discourse is socially and historically embodied."[432]

Newbigin continually states that rationality is always embodied and enculturated, and the influence of Wittgensteinien language games and Berger's social construction of reality thesis are the consistent intellectual backdrop to much of Newbigin's mature writings. Newbigin argues that the epistemological crisis is the biggest challenge facing the church. Netland for example argues for the need to examine the secularisation thesis. Citing church historian Owen Chadwick he states: "Enlightenment was of the few. Secularisation is of the many."[433] Newbigin, most probably due to a dependence on Berger's work at this point, would concur for the need to examine the process of secularisation and in fact devotes plenty of space in his writing to the issue of secularisation, a flawed thesis that Newbigin recants in "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society" where he devotes a whole chapter to explain why the secular society is a myth.[434] Netland goes on to argue for a clearer understanding of culture by greater attention being given to sociology. Netland's critique begs the question why supplement

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[431] Newbigin(1986c):33
[432] Newbigin(1992e):2
[433] Netland(2001):76 citing Chadwick,O. (1975) *Secularisation of the European Mind.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:9
[434] Newbigin(1989e):211

the history-of-ideas approach only with sociology, why not also include anthropology and economics? In order to avoid the charge of reductionism every discipline would need to be examined for its implications for the development of the cultures of modernity. More significantly as will be examined, Stephen Williams criticises Newbigin's lack of theological evaluation of the Enlightenment. Once again it must be noted there will always be reductionism when seeking to provide a generalised picture of a culture as there is a tension between descriptive exhaustiveness and descriptive usefulness. In attempting to provide a thumbnail sketch of modernity Newbigin has obviously not been exhaustive in his analytical method, therefore Netland's criticisms seem unjustified.

Newbigin is reliant on a reading of the history-of-ideas that sees Cartesian rationalism as a controlling emphasis in modernity. He bases his approach on Polanyi's reading of intellectual history and also that of Paul Hazzard[435]. Newbigin argues that basically the Enlightenment was "the genesis of our modern culture… the decisive point where it becomes fully conscious of itself."[436] Newbigin continues that "we shall not be wrong if we take the abandonment of teleology as the key to understanding the whole of these vast changes in the human situation."[437] Teleology was an unnecessary explanatory category as cause and effect became adequate explanatory categories, indeed "no alleged knowledge is regarded as secure against doubt unless it conforms to this pattern"[438] of explaining everything solely in terms of the effects of antecedent causes. Newbigin argues that the rejection of teleological explanation jars against human experience stating that "purpose remains an inescapable element in human life."[439]

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[435] Hazard(1973)
[436] Newbigin(1986c):22
[437] Newbigin(1986c):34
[438] Newbigin(1986c):35
[439] Newbigin(1986c):35

According to Newbigin this led to the bifurcation of knowledge into facts and values which was explored earlier.

We have already dealt with Netland's criticism regarding Newbigin's reductionistic approach to the Enlightenment, now we must asses whether Netland's argument that Cartesian rationalism was not a primary influence on modernity, stands up to closer inspection. Netland argues that John Locke, Isaac Newton and Francis Bacon rather than Descartes are the seventeenth century figures that most importantly anticipate the Enlightenment. It is true that Newbigin argues that Descartes' quest for an autonomous foundation for thought as a significant part of his critique of the Enlightenment, but it must also be said that a major part of Newbigin's critique of modernity is its over-reliance on the empiricism that Bacon[440] and Newton exemplify. Locke's philosophical rationalism causes Newbigin concern. In his "Essay on Human Understanding" Locke rejected Descartes' contention that there are primary self-evident truths stamped onto the mind by arguing instead that the mind is a blank sheet: he then inquires: "how comes it to be furnished?...Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge?... To this I answer, in one word, from experience"[441]. However for Locke the human mind has "no other immediate object but its own ideas, which alone it can contemplate",[442] and therefore for Locke knowledge is defined as "the perception of the connexion of and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas."[443] Where information of an object is based on empirical data rather than the intellectual perception of connection between ideas, for example regarding the tensile strength of a metal, Locke states that where "there is a want of discoverable connection between

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[440] Newbigin(1986c):76
[441] Locke(1689): 2.1.2 :70 cited in Brown(1990):222
[442] Locke(1690): 4.1.1 :424
[443] Locke(1690): 4.1.2 :424 cited in Spellman(1997):43

those ideas which we have… and are… left only to observation and experiment."[444] Locke explicitly argues that they do not constitute knowledge but rather "belief, assent, or opinion, which is the admitting or receiving any proposition for true, upon arguments or proofs that are found to persuade us to receive it as true, without certain knowledge that it is so."[445] Although the divide does not come where might be expected, that is from an empiricist epistemology, this bifurcation into knowledge and opinion brings us back once again to one of the central themes of Newbigin's critique of modernity: the divide between public and private, facts and values. Faith for Locke is

> "assent to any proposition not thus made out of deductions of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of communication. This way of discovering truths to men, we call revelation."[446]

Locke held to a dichotomy between beliefs/opinions and knowledge which is an essential part of Newbigin's critique of the Enlightenment. Thus Netland's criticism of Newbigin once again appears unfounded.

3.2d Williams' critique: ignoring the quest of human autonomy

Stephen Williams critiques Newbigin's (and also explicitly Colin Gunton's) reading of intellectual history in his incisive book "Revelation and Reconciliation."[447] He criticises Newbigin for focussing primarily on epistemology in his understanding of the Enlightenment and especially for attributing the success of the scientific explanation to narrowing what was acceptable as knowledge as opposed to opinion. Thus Williams challenges Newbigin's insistence that the Enlightenment involved a bifurcation into knowledge and opinion, fact and value.

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[444] Locke(1690): 4.3.28 :455
[445] Locke(1690): 4:15:3 :556
[446] Locke(1690): 4:18:2 :583
[447] Williams(1995)

Williams argues that Newbigin's reading of the history-of-ideas changed when he read Graf Reventlow's work "The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World"[448] noting that Newbigin caveats "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society" by stating that Reventlow demonstrates "how the attack has its origins, far earlier than the rise of modern science, in the strong humanist tradition which.. surfaced in the Renaissance."[449] Williams argues that this admission is pointless as "it leads him to no perceptible modification of his historical thesis either in this or the succeeding volume."[450] As has been shown Newbigin has continually provided caveats to his history-of-ideas approach stating that there were of course antecedents to the Enlightenment. For example in "Foolishness to the Greeks" Newbigin notes that although modern culture can be traced back to the Enlightenment, one cannot ignore the prehistory and social context of

> "the translation of Aristotle into Latin, the flood of classical ideas in the Renaissance, the fierce theological and political controversies of the reformation, the wars of religion and – above all – the new developments in science… above all by Isaac Newton."[451]

Newbigin's project is not to provide an exhaustive history-of-ideas but to attempt a missionary engagement with contemporary culture. William's central critique is not however to pick apart Newbigin's reconstruction of intellectual history but to query

> "an account which puts stress as do Newbigin and Gunton on the epistemological in association with the scientific angle."[452]

Williams questions the exclusion of moral agency in Newbigin's analysis of the Enlightenment movement. He notes that the key figure in the evaluation of western intellectual history is Augustine, and he observes that Newbigin's analysis is dependent on Polanyi who in turn is dependent on Augustine to challenge the privileging of doubt

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[448] Reventlow(1984)
[449] Newbigin(1989e):1-2
[450] Williams(1995):11
[451] Newbigin(1996b):24-25
[452] Williams(1995):12

over faith. Williams helpfully points out that in Augustine's own conversion experience there were two stumbling blocks to his acceptance of the Christian faith; intellectual and spiritual. The former was resolved through his synthesis of Christian theology and Neoplatonic philosophy and the latter was dealt with through the "mediation of Christ." Williams cites Charles Cochrane's analysis that "Augustine could locate the error of classical culture in the moral realm of self-will even more significantly than in the moral realm of epistemological method."[453] Williams goes on to cite Kierkegaard:

> "People try to persuade us that the objections against Christianity spring from doubt. The objections against Christianity spring from insubordination, the dislike of obedience, rebellion against all authority. As a result people have been beating the air in their struggle against objections, because they have fought intellectually with doubts instead of fighting morally with rebellion."[454]

This is a very important contribution to the reading of intellectual history. Williams' and Kierkegaard's analyses seek to apply the biblical concepts of the fall of humanity and the noetic effects of sin. This is an important point as both authors refuse to succumb to the fact-value distinction that Newbigin warns against, namely that the sciences (including social sciences) are more intellectually credible than the biblical account, the former constituting facts, the latter only values.

3.2e Response to Williams

Williams' critique of the over-emphasis on epistemology in his reading on the Enlightenment is not wholly justified as the application of biblical concepts such as sin to the history-of-ideas is not wholly absent in Newbigin's reading of the Enlightenment; he does note the search for autonomy, for example, as a prime motivator in the Enlightenment.

> "one could say that with the new Cartesian starting point… was a small-scale repetition of the fall. Adam is not content to trust God. He wants to have his own certitude, based on an experimental test of the validity's of God's promise."[455]

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[453] Williams(1986):372
[454] Kierkegaard quoted in Williams(1995):6
[455] Newbigin(1991g):13

But Newbigin's theological evaluation of western cultures is weak and he relies more on epistemological and sociological categories as he seeks to map the terrain of late modern cultures. Williams' and Newbigin's reading of intellectual history are not necessarily contradictory. Instead of seeing the quest for autonomy and epistemology as mutually exclusive, it is better to see them in concert such that human autonomy is the motivation and epistemological independence the expression of that autonomy. An emic perspective seeks to understand how a social process is understood from within the group being studied leads to an epistemological understanding of the crisis in western knowledge. A theological evaluation of western cultures provides an etic perspective on western intellectual history that reveals the desire for autonomy and independent moral agency. Thus a complementary reading of William's and Newbigin's emphases can be accomplished.

3.2f Bevans' cultural critique

Stephen Bevans has written a seminal text on different models of contextual theology, in the second edition of which he adds a new chapter using Newbigin as the chief exemplar of the countercultural model of contextualisation.[456] Bevans' work provides a six-fold taxonomy for contextual theologising which provides a helpful grid to locate Newbigin's approach to contextualisation.

1. The Translation Model – this assumes that the gospel is understood by the evangelist and what is needed is a deeper understanding of the recipient culture "so as to effectively insert the gospel."[457] Bevans argues that this approach has a basically naïve understanding of the relationship between gospel and culture.

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[456] Bevans(2002):121
[457] Bevans(2002):141

2. The Anthropological Model – this assumes that the gospel is in some way already present in a culture and therefore the evangelist's job is to understand the culture well enough to be able to "pull the gospel out of it."[458] This approach although taking culture seriously falls prey to what Bevans describes as "cultural romanticism"[459] and the gospel can become a lowest common denominator of shared values between the evangelist and the recipient culture.
3. The Praxis Model – this emphasises a dialectical relationship between gospel and culture and endorses a practice/reflection/practice pattern for presenting the gospel in a new context. This model has been practiced by liberation theologians and has often been criticised for its essentially Marxist approach. A weakness also seems to be that gospel and culture have co-equal authority, thus the gospel can be influenced by context as well as context being influenced by the gospel: a form of syncretism may be an inherent danger in this approach.
4. The Synthetic Model – this is essentially a dialogical approach between gospel and culture. It is relatively similar to the praxis model and suffers from the same vulnerability of syncretism.
5. The Transcendental Model – this emphasises revelation as primarily a direct personal encounter with God and therefore the cultural context is not ultimately that significant.
6. The Countercultural model – whose chief exemplar is Lesslie Newbigin.

"Newbigin argues that contextualisation is an ugly but necessary word that has advantages over the old protestant word "indigenisation" and the catholic word "adaptation" the former directing attention to the past of a culture rather than its present

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[458] Bevans(2002):141
[459] Bevans(2002):141

and future and the latter which suggested that the missionary was the bearer of a pure, culture-free gospel which had then to be adapted to the receptor culture. Bevans identifies Newbigin's antipathy towards the notion of an uncontextualised gospel. Newbigin is well aware that there is no such thing a "culturally uncontaminated gospel"[460] stating: "every statement of the gospel from the New Testament onwards is already culturally conditioned., "[461] Newbigin argues that contextualisation is vital as human beings exist only as "members of communities which share a common language, customs, ways of ordering economic and social life, ways of understanding and coping with their world."[462] Newbigin's response to this is that the gospel must be "communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols that are meaningful to them."[463] These values are shared by most of the contextual models that Bevans cites, but Newbigin goes on to argue that the gospel comes not as "a disembodied message, but as the message of a community which claims to live by it."[464] Newbigin introduces to the contextual equation the missionary culture of the church. But Newbigin does not naively assume as in the translation model that the missionary culture of the church is insulated from its own host cultural context, Newbigin states it clearly:

> "every communication of the gospel is already culturally conditioned... "[465]
> "the missionary does not come with the pure gospel and then adapt it to the culture where she serves: she comes with a gospel which is already embodied in some cultural form"[466]

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[460] Newbigin(1986c):149
[461] Newbigin(1985a):26
[462] Newbigin(1989e):141
[463] Newbigin(1989e):141
[464] Newbigin(1989e):141
[465] Newbigin(1989e):142
[466] Newbigin(1989e):144

This thesis has used Hunsberger's[467] diagrammatic representation of Newbigin's "three-cornered relationship between gospel, church and culture."[468] Newbigin's approach is best seen in comparison with Eugine Nida's three culture model of missionary dialogue.

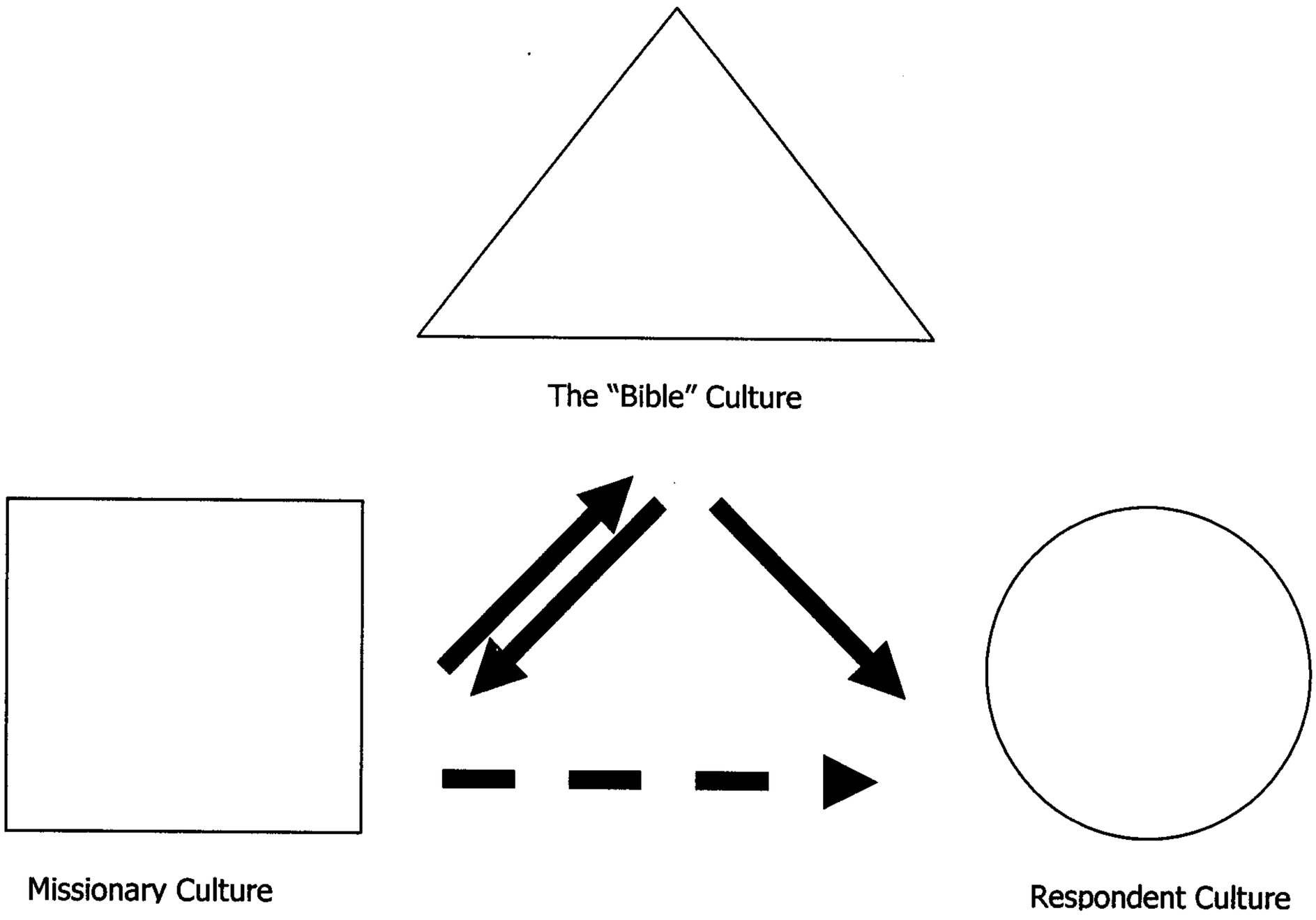

Figure 3: Nida's Three Culture Model of Missionary Communication[469]

The most important difference between Newbigin and Nida is that Newbigin's approach offers a triad of dialogical relationships, while Nida offers only one dialogical relationship (between the Bible culture and the missionary culture) and two monological relationships (between the Bible culture and the missionary culture and the respondent culture). At first sight for Newbigin to argue that there is a dialogical relationship between gospel and culture may give the impression that he is closer to the synthetic model than is the case. The synthetic model gives equal weight to the gospel and to

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[467] Hunsberger(1996b):3-25
[468] Newbigin(1985h):149
[469] Nida, E.(1952) *God's Word in Man's Language*. New York: Harper & Row:45-46 cited in Hesselgrave(1991):108

culture as means of divine revelation, which leaves syncretism or imperialism as viable options, as both are manifestations of skewed relationships between gospel and culture. Syncretism allows culture to dictate the content of the gospel and imperialism allows one particular cultural understanding of the gospel to dominate another culture. But Hunsberger's mapping of Newbigin's approach to contextualisation significantly places the gospel at the zenith of the triangle as Newbigin contends that:

> "true contextualisation accords the gospel its rightful primacy, its power to penetrate every culture and to speak within each culture, in its own speech and symbol, the word which both No and Yes, both judgement and grace."[470]

Hunsberger continually cites Newbigin's commitment to biblical authority challenging both the cultural context and church praxis.[471] This is the heart of the counter-cultural model; it seeks to take culture seriously and yet maintain a critical distance so that culture can be critiqued. It is at this juncture that Bevans' key criticism of Newbigin's approach to culture becomes germane. Bevans argues that the emphasis and strength of the "Countercultural Model" of contextual theologising is that it

> "realises more than any other model... how some contexts are simply antithetical to the gospel and need to be challenged by the gospel's liberating and healing power."[472]

This strength can also function as its weakness, although Bevans is clear to state that this model should not be understood as "anti-cultural."[473] He cites H. Richard Niebuhr and Willian Willimon in this regard. Indeed Bevans responds to Goheen's criticism of an early draft of the chapter on the countercultural model in which Bevans seemed to imply that Newbigin had an anti-cultural stance.[474] Nevertheless Bevans still argues "although most practioners of the model recognise the need to be countercultural rather than anticultural, the danger does persist."[475] Bevans' reminder is helpful and despite

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[470] Newbigin(1989e):152
[471] Hunsberger(1998):255
[472] Bevans(2002):118
[473] Bevans(2002):118
[474] Bevans(2002):175 footnote 8 citing Goheen(2001):330-370
[475] Bevans(2002):125

Newbigin's desire to affirm that the gospel is both "No" and Yes" both judgement and grace, in much of his writings with respect to his approach to late-modern cultures there is a greater sense of judgement than grace, and a far greater amount of criticism, for example of the negative effects of the Enlightenment on the church than any of its positives. Indeed Newbigin writes that Enlightenment thinkers:

> "in general failed to realise how radical is the contradiction between the Christian vision and the assumptions that we breathe from every part of our shared existence."[476]

This anti-cultural criticism is shared by Walton and Graham in their analysis of Newbigin's missiology. They state more forthrightly than Bevans dares to that with respect to the relationship between gospel and culture:

> "one might risk the contention that Newbigin's position precludes any radical encounter between these two realms, and might more adequately be described as gospel against our culture."[477]

Newbigin argues vehemently against this reading of his Gospel and Our Culture (GOC) project:

> "GOC has never understood itself as primarily a critique of our culture, but as an effort to clarify the issues involved in communicating the Gospel to this particular culture."[478]

But Graham and Walton are not alone in their critique of Newbigin's apparently anti-cultural stance, Sander Griffioen comments that

> "I find it striking that in his discussion of contextualisation he pays virtually no attention to the gospel as an agent of inner reformation of cultural renewal. All the emphasis is on the critical and judging function of the word. This is the "Barthian" side of his thought."[479]

Griffioen's conclusion that it is the Barthian influence on Newbigin that encourages his anti-cultural stance is interesting, he does not cite any evidence to support this assertion,

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[476] Newbigin(1987a):1 cited in Goheen(2002b):141
[477] Walton & Graham(1991):2
[478] Newbigin(1992e):2
[479] Griffioen(1996):12-13

but the radical discontinuity that Barth espouses between the revealed word of God and culture does seem a likely explanation to Newbigin's anti-cultural approach.

3.2g Response to Bevans

Goheen has written specifically to defend Newbigin's approach to cultures against being labelled "anti-cultural"[480] and yet he admits that Newbigin's work, while leaving room for the affirmation of western culture, "*stresses* the antithetical side of cultural involvement."[481] Goheen avers that this stress is due to Newbigin's experience within the ecumenical movement where Newbigin "observed the pervasive chameleon theology of many within the WCC"[482] and so Newbigin was writing into a context where the antithetical relationship between gospel and culture was never mentioned. Thus Goheen contends that Newbigin's theology was both affirming and challenging of western cultures but that the anti-cultural aspect of his position was simply the one he emphasised because in the ecumenical context it was the missing voice. Goheen's approach sounds plausible and may account for some of Newbigin's negativity toward western cultures. But the adequacy of Goheen's theory can best be evaluated after the next step in the exploration of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation.

3.2h Multicultural critique

One facet of Newbigin's approach to cultures that has not received a critique is his understanding of the multi-cultural nature of western societies. At one level the term "multi-cultural" is a truism that describes the multitude of cultures that co-exist in western contexts. At another level the term "multi-cultural" refers to the ideal of a celebration of the unity-in-diversity of western cultures. Newbigin has often remarked upon the pluralistic nature[483] of the West. But there is a sense in which he ignores the

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[480] Goheen(2002b)
[481] Goheen(2002b):140
[482] Goheen(2002b):140
[483] Newbigin(1989e):14 & (1977a)

diversity of cultures to focus on commonalities. In a paper on "Evangelism in a multi-cultural society"[484] Newbigin argues that the church's loss of confidence is due to:

> "our culture- not our culture in the multi-cultural sense but in its more mono-cultural sense.. I mean that whatever may be the varieties of culture that are represented in our society we share what sociologists call 'a plausibility structure'."[485]

Despite, as will be demonstrated, Newbigin's misappropriation of Berger's term plausibility structure this quotation demonstrates Newbigin's conviction that there is an overarching homogeneity to western societies despite apparent multi-cultural diversity. Newbigin assumes that all the inhabitants of a society no matter what their individual cultures believe share a common "plausibility structure." Newbigin goes on to argue that "this plausibility structure – determines whether in any society any particular belief is plausible or not."[486] Thus for Newbigin it is the common plausibility structure that ultimately homogenises society and that acts as the arbiter of what is held to be true by all the members of the society. These are not isolated quotations. In another paper addressing the issue of mission in a pluralistic society[487] Newbigin's opening statement is that "No society is totally pluralist. In every society there is what Peter Berger calls a "plausibility structure."[488] Note the reference to a singular plausibility structure which diminishes the importance of subcultural particularities.

Newbigin's failure to grasp the degree of diversity present within western society is hard to explain. The idea of homogenised western muli-cultural societies may be attributed due to an assimilation model of cultural diversity. At one level there is no doubt that despite the British government's commitment to multicultural policies that

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[484] Newbigin(1991k)
[485] Newbigin(1991k):1
[486] Newbigin(1991k):1
[487] Newbigin(1994o)
[488] Newbigin(1994o):158

"advocated integration rather than assimilation"[489], where assimilation was seen as a 'flattening process' and integration promoted 'equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'[490], there is a homogenising tendency in British society. Being British does have an impact on all immigrants but to argue that it becomes the defining characteristic of the intellectual life of those immigrants is naïve.

It also true that globalisation often means westernisation[491] but this globalisation thesis is too simplistic an approach. It fails to take into consideration the way that "non-western ideas also travel… back"[492] and the way that the perceived westernisation effect of globalisation has produced a culturally conservative backlash in some parts of the world[493]. The same process can be seen in microcosm within western societies as Konrad Raiser writes:

> "While there is the fear that globalisation will lead to the imposition of a unified culture based on the Western clause of consumerism, there is also growing evidence of the resistance of local communities defending their own culture or of migrants and indigenous communities trying to recover their cultural values and mark their difference from the dominant environment."[494]

But by focussing virtually exclusively on a presumed shared Enlightenment bifurcation between fact and value Newbigin underplays the significance of the cultural diversity within western societies. At first sight it might seem that Newbigin has fallen prey to what Graham Huggan describes as "virtual multi-culturalism":[495] that is Newbigin has believed the unintentionally optimistic, and often politically motivated, skewed depiction of cultural integration that has been propagated. But Newbigin's own

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[489] Huggan(2001):70 citing the 1966 speech of the Right Hon. Roy Jenkins, Home Secretary under the Wilson government in Britian.
[490] Huggan(2001):70
[491] Parekh(2000):164
[492] Parekh(2000):164
[493] Huntington(1997)
[494] Raiser(1999):199
[495] Huggan(2001)

experience of life in Winson Green, Birmingham where he describes the relative openness to the gospel of migrants[496] when compared to those of English heritage, and his writings on Islam in Britain demonstrate his awareness of diversity. He also writes in a very different tone in a book that was published in the year of his death. In a chapter entitled "Multiculturalism and Neutrality"[497] Newbigin writes:

> "we are a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society. The histories our children learn in school… are not coherent but vastly diverse. Whether at school or in the mosque, temple or gudwara, children learn many different histories and are shaped thereby into different identities. There are agonising tensions."[498]

Newbigin was also well aware of the extent to which cultures shape concepts of identity and rationality due to the influence of both Berger and Alasdair MacIntyre on his epistemology and his approach to cultures. Newbigin was well aware of the tensions in western societies between cultural groups so why then in his writings does he constantly deal with generalities, the supposed commonalities and not the specifics of the individual cultures? The Gospel and Our Culture Network seems to assume a homogenised western culture. It may well be that Newbigin is simply seeking a short-cut to engaging western cultures with the gospel and so chooses to ignore diversity. Thus Newbigin's continual exposition of his own interpretation of the history-of-ideas leading to the current epistemological crisis in late-modern cultures is seen as the extent to which the (re)contextualisation of the gospel needs to go. But if the church does not take into consideration the cultural distinctives of the various ethnic groups in western societies it aligns itself with a new form of hegemonic imperialism.

It is now time to turn to Newbigin's three-culture model of missionary communication. Newbigin's model captures well the way in which the cultures of the gospel, congregation and target culture influence and are influenced by one another. What the

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[496] Newbigin(1987b):356
[497] Newbigin(1998a):3
[498] Newbigin(1998a):3

diagram is not able to communicate is that the target culture is also influenced by other cultures and is itself in a state of flux. As has been noted Newbigin is well aware of the relationship between liberal and conservative elements in any culture[499] and also that every "cultural community exists in the midst of others and is inescapably influenced by them"[500] such that no one culture can be viewed in complete isolation from another. Yet the model that Newbigin presents for missionary communication in the clearest articulation of his missionary theology the "Open Secret" now appears too simplistic as it limits itself to a three-culture model.

The diagram below seeks to visualise the interplay of conservative and liberal tendencies and the overlap of cultures such that an individual or community can be understood to exist in the intersection of more than one cultural group.

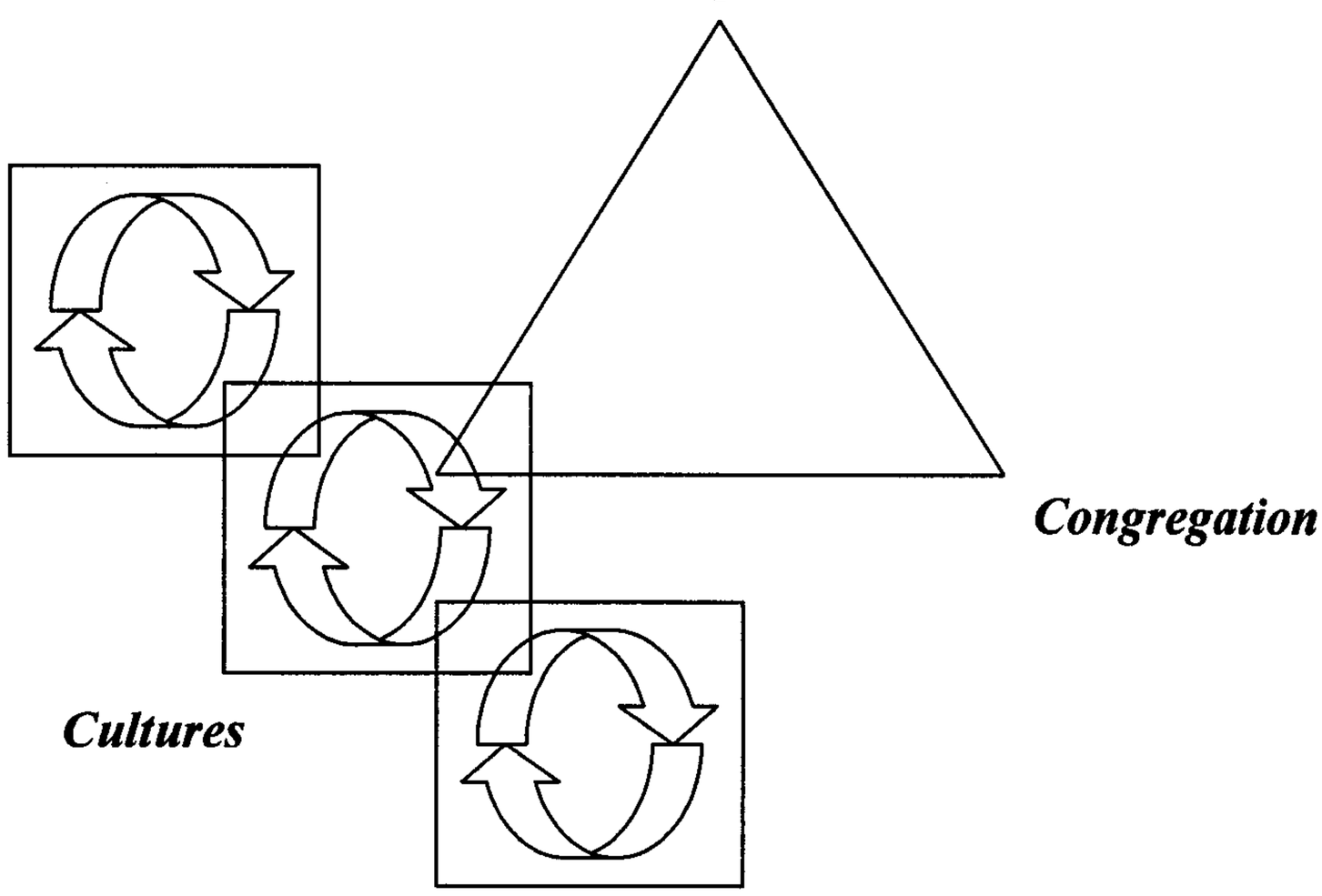

Figure 4: Alternative model of missionary communication

But even this model does not go far enough as it shares a fault with Newbigin's original model as it seems to imply that the gospel only needs to (re)contextualised in one

[499] Newbigin(1998a):6
[500] Parekh(2000):163

cultural context at a time leading to segregation in mission in a multicultural society producing mono-cultural expressions of the gospel. This aspect will be explored when the third corner of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation is examined: the congregation.

Newbigin's missiological engagement with western cultures was to concentrate on what he perceived to be the commonalities between the cultures present in society – the shared Enlightenment fact-value dichotomy. Another resource available to him as he searched for common ground between the diverse cultures in western societies could have been general revelation and it is to this ultimately untapped resource in Newbigin's theological project that we now turn. Newbigin's approach to general revelation not only provides the key to deciding between Goheen's and Griffioen's reading of Newbigin's doctrine of culture, general revelation also brings an important perspective to theological approaches to culture and especially the diaological relationship that Newbigin posits between the gospel and cultures. Some advocates of general revelation argue that there is no culture that has not received revelation from God and therefore the relationship between gospel and culture cannot simply be criticism. Thus the doctrine of general revelation carries far-reaching implications for a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures.

3.3 Newbigin's approach to general revelation

The cultural corner provides the opportunity to explore the way in which God has revealed himself in all cultures before the gospel arrives. At first glance this would seem to negate the need to (re)contextualise the gospel which has been a major part of this thesis' approach to evangelism. It could be argued that if there is a supra-cultural general revelation that provides the context for all evangelistic communication then there is no need to (re)contextualise the gospel as there is always a common context. This is not the direction in which this chapter proceeds, rather as will be argued the

noetic effects of the fall are such that each culture uniquely rejects and responds to God's general revelation, leaving each culture a hybrid of wilful ignorance and willing acceptance of God's revelation. It also follows that if there is no general revelation then there is no commonality between any cultures and it is impossible to ever (re)contextualise the gospel. As will be seen Newbigin makes very little use of the concept of general revelation within cultures and to state the conclusion at the beginning, his approach to general revelation will be shown to be internally inconsistent due in part to the eclectic nature of his theological influences. The resources of Newbigin's underutilised doctrine of general revelation will be examined to discover its relevance for a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures.

3.3a Demarcation between special and general revelation

The demarcation between general and special revelation is contentious although there is not a wide range of theological literature available in this area. As a rare exemplar of an evangelical engagement with this issue N.H. Gootjes offers a useful starting point for discussion. Gootjes argues for three areas of differentiation between special and general revelation: intended audience, content and the means of revelation.

Intended audience

Gootjes argues that

> "in general revelation the receivers should be seen as all men (Acts 14:16–17; Rom 1:8ff.). But in special revelation, the number of receivers cannot be defined." [501]

Gootjes' hesitancy in defining the numbers is due to the theological tension between those advocating a strictly Calvinistic approach, who might argue that those addressed by special revelation are the elect who would necessarily respond to it due to the effectual nature of God's revelation, and those arguing that special revelation can be

[501] Gootjes(1989):368

received by all but not everyone will respond to it. For the purposes of this study, the demarcation will be based on the universal audience of general revelation and the limited audience of special revelation.

Content of revelation

Gootjes argues that as to the content, general revelation displays "God in his work in the world, his power, his care, his will, and his anger. On the other hand special revelation centres on God's salvation-work but also includes the information which is revealed by general revelation.[502] Gootjes' approach apparently echoes the distinction made by the eighteenth century theologian Jonathan Edwards that general revelation reveals God as Creator while special revelation reveals God as Redeemer.[503] Edwards' eloquence is theologically inadequate as he does not take into consideration the place of conscience or God's providential sustaining of his creation. Another possibility for demarcation is that general revelation reveals knowledge about God but special revelation reveals the knowledge of God, with the emphasis being on a distinction between information and personal knowledge. Newbigin's emphasis on the narrative nature of the gospel revelation providing the best way to communicate God's personality and character would offer some support for this, as would Buber's distinction between "I-Thou" and "I-it."

Means of revelation

Gootjes argues that "general revelation uses only God's work as its means"[504] whilst in special revelation God uses "not only nature and history, but also God's word, which he made known in several ways, and most of all… God's Son Jesus Christ."[505] This means of demarcation is unhelpful as it is hard to define what Gootjes means by 'God's work',

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[502] Gootjes(1989):368
[503] McDermot(2000):51
[504] Gootjes(1989):368
[505] Gootjes(1989):368

as at some level everything that occurs can be described as God's work. Exactly which means God uses in general revelation and special revelation will be examined in detail but to aid demarcation it is simply noted that different means are employed.

A chronological caveat must be made to Gootjes' position as these three distinctions between general and special revelation apply only to the current age. Eschatologicaly the Bible affirms that Christ will be revealed to all[506] in such a way that those who have believed in Christ will be vindicated for their faith. This would jeopardise the three areas of demarcation as the intended audience for this revelation would be the whole of humanity, the content of this revelation would be the truth about Christ, including his role as saviour, and the means of this general revelation would be the person of Christ himself.

The relationship between general revelation and evangelism has not received the scholarly attention it deserves and as a result the resources it provides for evangelism in the contemporary west have not been adequately explored. Theologically informed answers to questions such as the possibility of a 'point of contact' in evangelism and the extent to which the un-evangelised have knowledge of God could provide the church with enormous help in seeking to proclaim the gospel. God's universal revelation of himself to humanity is a wide subject area and in this thesis investigation will be restricted to two areas. Firstly the nature and sources of general revelation will be examined, involving an historical approach to the influences on Newbigin's doctrine. Second, the relationship between general revelation and Newbigin's theology of religions will be examined, which is particularly pertinent in light of the pluralistic nature of western societies.

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[506] Philippians 2:10-11

3.4 Historical influences on Newbigin's approach to general revelation

In order to accurately assess Newbigin's approach to the doctrine of general revelation it is necessary to review three historically significant theologians, all of whom have heavily influenced Newbigin's position: Aurelius Augustine, John Calvin and Karl Barth.

3.4a Augustine

Bishop Aurelius Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is a major influence on Newbigin; and his dictum "*nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*"[507] "Unless you believe, you shall not understand" is a controlling idea in Newbigin's epistemology and so examining Augustine's approach to general revelation will provide a helpful historical backdrop to Newbigin's position.

General revelation and common grace

Augustine saw the revelation of God in neo-platonic philosophy, writing that:

> "It is evident that none came nearer to us than the Platonists… their gold and silver [were] dug out of the mines of God's providence which are everywhere scattered abroad."[508]

Augustine's appreciation of neo-Platonism can be seen in his differentiation between eternal truths and temporal truths:

> "through understanding or intellectual cognizance (*intellectus*) man intuits directly or through signs eternal changeless principles of mathematics, logic, ethics, and truths of God."[509]

Augustine however does argue for the noetic implications of the fall, such that "every man is born mentally blind"[510] and that humanity is incapable of intuiting eternal

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[507] Augustine, "De libero Arbitrio" 1:4 cited in Polanyi(1962):266
[508] Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine." Schaff, P.(1956) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church V2-05* :554 cited in Demarest(1982):26
[509] Demarest(1982):27

changeless truths. In order for genuine communication of truth God must therefore "heal, perfect and free the will to make it respond positively to Him."[511] Thus for Augustine humanity needs divine grace in order to know anything at all. The Augustinian doctrine of general revelation relies on common grace enabling natural man to accurately evaluate data from the temporal world and allowing humanity "access to historical knowledge of Jesus Christ and it is this knowledge that acts as a foundation for faith."[512] Augustine argues that through the natural world under the common grace of God all people are able to know eternal truths of God from nature, providence and history.[513] These three sources of general revelation will be examined in some depth when Calvin's approach is examined.

Faith and reason

Augustine appeals to nearly all of the classical proofs for the existence of God and at one stage concludes that:

> "except for a few whose human nature is too depraved the whole human race acknowledges that God is the author of this world"[514]

Thus Augustine argues that:

> "we must refuse so to believe as not to receive or seek a reason for our belief, since we could not believe at all if we did not have rational souls."[515]

Colin Brown observes that in the same letter Augustine goes on to argue that:

> "there are some things which are for the present beyond the grasp of reason. In such cases it is reasonable to let faith precede revelation."[516]

Augustine then goes on to refer to Isaiah 7:9[517]:

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[510] Augustine "On Nature and Grace." Schaff, P. (1956) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church V1-05* :122
[511] Demarest(1982):27
[512] Demarest(1982):28
[513] Demarest(1982):28
[514] Augustine, "On the Gospel of John." *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church V6-02* :400 in cited in Demarest(1982):28
[515] Letter 120.3 (Augustine, Letters Volume 2 Translated Parsons, W. (1953) New York: Fathers of the Church Inc. :83-130 cited in Brown(1990):97
[516] Brown(1990):97

> "'If you will not believe, you will not understand'; thereby he undoubtedly made a distinction between these two things and advised us to believe first so to be able to understand whether we believe. It is then a reasonable requirement that faith precede reason, for, if this requirement is not reasonable then it is contrary to reason, which God forbid it. "[518]

This argument seems somewhat circular as it implies that it is reasonable that faith precedes belief because if it was not reasonable then it would not be God-forbidden. Paul Helm argues that for Augustine faith "has some cognitive content"[519] that is there is a body of beliefs that needs to be understood in order to be assented to "otherwise how faith in God would… be distinguished from faith in anyone else?"[520] Augustine's faith-seeks-understanding project means that this initial understanding sets the agenda for what is believed. Thus Augustine argues,

> "Who cannot see that thinking is prior to believing? For no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed. For however suddenly, however rapidly, some thoughts fly before the will to believe, and this presently follows in such wise as to attend them, as it were, in closest conjunction, it is yet necessary that everything which is believed should be believed after thought has preceded; although even belief itself is nothing else than to think with assent." [521]

Demarest argues that for Augustine salvation is not possible without faith and personal commitment to Christ and it is this that provides the context for Augustine's statement that "*nisi credideritis, non intelligetis*" and "*si non potes intelligere, crede ut intellihas*" (if you cannot understand, believe in order to understand).[522] Demarest summarises Augustine's position by quoting him "Faith is in some way the starting point of knowledge. This is highly significant for Newbigin's epistemology as it provides the

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[517] The context of the passage suggests that the NIV's translation "Unless you believe you will not stand at all" is more accurate as the issue is whether Judah will choose the way of Ephraim and trust human alliances and be shattered or whether they will trust in Yahweh. See Motyer(1993):82

[518] Letter 120.3 (Augustine, *Letters* Volume 2 Translated Parsons, W. (1953) New York: Fathers of the Church Inc. :83-130 cited in Brown(1990):97

[519] Helm(1997):27

[520] Helm(1997):27

[521] Augustine "A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints" in Schaff, P. (1956) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* V1-05 :500

[522] Demarest(1982):29

incentive for the "faith-seeking-understanding" project. Newbigin often quoted the following passage from Polanyi:

> "the critical movement, which seems to be nearing the end of its course today, was perhaps the most fruitful effort ever sustained by the human mind… But its incandescence had fed on the combustion of the Christian heritage in the oxygen of Greek rationalism, and when the fuel was exhausted the critical framework itself burnt away… we must now go back to St. Augustine to restore the balance of our cognitive powers"[523]

This brief overview of Augustine's doctrine of revelation demonstrates that he believed that the noetic effects of the fall rendered humanity blind to general revelation and yet under common grace all humanity can know God through general revelation. This dialectical tension will recur in Hendrik Kraemer's approach to general revelation. As will be shown, this Augustinian approach is present in a large part of Newbigin's theology, but it is never really exploited for its evangelistic resources.

3.4b Calvin

The Reformation was a reactive movement and in the area of the doctrine of revelation the main reaction was against Thomas Aquinas' theological incorporation of Aristotelian philosophy, which had been introduced into western thinking via the radical Muslim thinker Averroes in the twelfth century. Aquinas sought to interpret Aristotle in a way that would be "more favourable to the Christian faith."[524] In his most extensive apologetic work "Summa Contra Gentiles" (Summa) Aquinas seeks to demonstrate the reasonableness of the Christian faith. Aquinas believed that the human mind has limited competence, and assumed that it is possible to establish rationally "the existence of the one personal God and many other important religious truths, but there is a higher sphere of truth that remains impenetrable to man unless God is pleased to make them known by revelation."[525] Aquinas argues that God mercifully reveals even the things that can be

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[523] Polanyi(1962):266
[524] Dulles(1971):87
[525] Dulles(1971):88

known by reason so as not to preclude those who do not have the same opportunities for study and learning. Aquinas is careful not to over elevate the place of reason, for example in the introduction to Summa he writes:

> "for that which is above reason we believe only because God has revealed it. Nevertheless, there are certain likely arguments that should be set forth in order to make the divine truth known. This should be done for the training and consolation of the faithful, and not with the idea of refuting those who are adversaries."[526]

David Bosch argues that Aquinas' famous dictum *"Gratia non tollit sed perficit naturam"* (grace does not abolish nature but perfects it) allowed him to "transition from 'natural' to 'supernatural'"[527] Christianity. Bosch has in mind the relationship between supernatural revelation and natural theology. Natural theology is the "attempt to attain an understanding of God and his relationship with the universe by means of rational reflection,"[528] and could be seen as an extension of the areas of *Sensus Divinitatis* and the witness of creation. There are however anthropological and soteriological issues at stake in the acceptance of this approach that will be explored when the Barth/Brunner debate is examined. At this juncture natural theology is germane to the discussion as the Reformation theologians saw Aquinas' approach as in need of refutation.

Calvin's Institutes exhibit the high watermark of Reformed systematic theology and were enormously influential in shaping Newbigin's approach to the doctrine of revelation. Calvin argues that all knowledge of God is revealed; this is in clear contradistinction to Aquinas' insistence that man has an innate ability to approach God through unaided reason. In his commentary on John 1:9 Calvin writes:

> "the common light of nature… is far inferior to faith; for never will any man, by all the acuteness and sagacity of his own mind, penetrate into the kingdom of God. It is the Spirit of God alone who opens the gate of heaven to the elect.

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[526] Aquinas,T. "Summa Contra Gentiles" 1:9 in O'Neil, C.J (trans.) (1955-56) *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith.* New York: Garden City 1:77-78 cited in Dulles(1971):90
[527] Bosch(1977):190
[528] Brown(1988):452

> Next, let us remember that the light of reason which God implanted in men has been so obscured by sin, that amidst the thick darkness, and shocking ignorance, and gulf of errors, there are hardly a few shining sparks that are not utterly extinguished."[529]

Calvin does not deny the existence of general revelation but "despite the fact that human beings possess some moral and intellectual awareness of a divine presence in the cosmos, sin has so distorted (rational) human consciousness that this knowledge cannot properly direct them to the creator whose true nature and character is revealed in scripture.[530] Despite Calvin's view of the lack of soteriological efficacy of general revelation his theology provides four main sources for general revelation:

- *Sensus Divinitatis*
- Conscience
- Providence
- Creation

The first two sources of revelation are immediate and intuitional in their operation while the second two are mediated and inferential modes of revelation. All four of these areas are present, at least in embryonic form, in Newbigin's doctrine of general revelation.

Sensus Divinitatis

In Calvin the *Sensus Divinitatis* is explained in the following terms:

> "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory"[531]
>
> "Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity which can never be effaced, is engraved upon men's minds. Indeed the perversity of the impious, who though they struggle furiously are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction, namely that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow."[532]

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[529] Calvin(1553):15
[530] Chandler(2002)
[531] Calvin(1559):43-44 (1.3.1)
[532] Calvin(1559):45-46 (1.3.3)

Thus Calvin argues that this knowledge of God is intuitional rather than inferential, immediately present to consciousness rather than due to reflection on the created order. Calvin does not defend this position scripturally but bases his conclusion "completely on experience."[533] The common justification for this idea of general illumination is John 1:9. Interestingly Calvin argues from this verse for a general illumination but mainly in terms of the gifts of reason and conscience which make up the "peculiar excellence which raises [humanity]… above other animals."[534] Demarest uses John 1:9 as the main scriptural support for the concept of the positive illumination of all humanity.[535]

An echo of Calvin's approach to the *Sensus Divinitatis* appears in one of Newbigin's earliest books "Sin and Salvation". Newbigin argues that because man "was made by God for God, his heart still longs for something outside himself which he can trust and serve."[536] Newbigin goes on to state that "man is made for God, who is infinite; therefore man's desires are infinite and no finite thing can satisfy them."[537] This is a paraphrase of Augustine's famous prayer in Confessions; "you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until we find rest in you."[538] This approach remained a constant in Newbigin's apologetic approach as he writes some forty years later:

> "All human beings have longing for ultimate happiness… we must believe that this longing is something implanted in us by God. He has so made us that we have infinite desires beyond their satisfaction of our biological necessities, desires which only God himself can satisfy. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in him… the gospel breaks into this self-centred search for our own happiness…"[539]

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[533] Gootjes(1986):343
[534] Calvin(1553):15
[535] Morris(1995):84 in his commentary on John's gospel argues from this verse for "a general illumination of the whole race."
[536] Newbigin(1956):28
[537] Newbigin(1956):29
[538] Augustine "Confessions." Schaff, P. (1956) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* V1-01 1.1.1 :45
[539] Newbigin(1989e):179

The argument Newbigin is putting forward relates to a stream of biblical interpretation that argues that God is the means and ends for which humanity exists[540] and it is the privation of the presence of God, which leads to a longing[541] for fellowship with the Creator. Newbigin continues this line of reasoning in his mature work arguing that Jesus is:

> "the source of the world's life, the source - therefore - of that hunger that can only be fully satisfied when he is received as lord and saviour… just as physical hunger is a sign of life, so the hunger and thirst for righteousness to which Jesus promises satisfaction is itself a sign of the active presence of him who is the source of the world's life."[542]

This is different from Calvin's positive illumination concept; it is not based on humanity's God-given rational faculties that differentiate humans from animals nor a universal pre-reflective awareness of God's presence. Instead Newbigin is arguing for a longing or hunger that alerts humanity to the absence of a right relationship with God. Early church apologists such as Justin used John's identification of Jesus as the *logos* to derive the concept of the *logos spermatikos* the "divine reason sown in the world."[543]

This led Justin to conclude that those:

> "who are zealous for the good which is delivered to us, and practice it, have some share in God… they will, through God's grace, share in his dwelling place with us… such as live in accordance with the light of their knowledge are Christians, even if they are regarded as godless."[544]

Newbigin critiques this position on both exegetical and theological grounds. Exegetically Newbigin argues that within the context of John's gospel "the light of truth which shines on all men, brings… all under judgement."[545] Newbigin's position corresponds with the context of John 1:9 where the author argues that Jesus is the light of life that shone in the darkness and was not understood. Directly following John 1:9

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[540] Colossians 1:15-17
[541] Ecclesiastes 3:11 and Acts 17:26-28
[542] Newbigin(1983d):212
[543] Bosch(1978a):32
[544] Justin *Apology* I:10.46 cited in Bosch(1977):32
[545] Newbigin(1983d):212

the emphasis is on the fact that though the world was made through Jesus, the *logos*, the world did not recognise him or receive him. Thus the concept of general illumination in John is very similar to Paul's in Romans[546]; the light of truth robs humanity of the excuse of ignorance and leaves humanity universally guilty before the judgement of God. Newbigin's second line of argument against the early church's position on the *logos* doctrine is theological in nature, arguing that this makes Christ the saviour "of the good and the wise of former days, not as the saviour of sinners."[547] Thus Newbigin argues that the essential core of the gospel of grace is undermined. Newbigin's arguments are persuasive and apply equally well against the recent revival of the *logos spermatikos* among theologians such as Karl Rahner and Georges Khodr who have argued in a similar vein to Justin and have arrived at the possibility of anonymous Christians.[548] Bosch draws attention to the danger inherent in overemphasising general revelation, that of dehistoricising Christianity, arguing that "we cannot speak about the *Logos* without relating it to the statement of the word became flesh… the *logos* very easily becomes a general idea, an eternal truth."[549]

Despite these reservations Newbigin does hold to a version of Calvin's *Sensus Divinitatis* and argues that:

> "Wherever human beings are found there are always evidences of some awareness of God, however faint and confused… this awareness, valid as it is and much to be respected as it ought to be, does not itself communicate the full understanding of God's purpose for human beings."[550]

> "[I]n making the gospel known to any race of men anywhere we bring them nothing strange, we bring them the secret of their own being, the revelation of the true source of their own life. We bring them, in effect, the light they already have, the light that enlightens every man…" [551]

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[546] Romans1:18-20
[547] Newbigin(1983d):212
[548] Newbigin cites Rahner,K. (1966) Theological Investigations. London: Darton Longman and Todd. See D'Costa(1985) for a recent review of Rahner's position.
[549] Bosch(1983d):33
[550] Newbigin(1989e):73
[551] Newbigin(1961b):65

These quotations endorse a traditional reformed position on the *Sensus Divinitatis* and, as will be demonstrated, this has serious implications for Newbigin's apologetic approach and his theology of religions. Two transcribed evangelistic preaching series provide an opportunity to observe how Newbigin utilised general revelation in his evangelistic praxis. "Christ our Eternal Contemporary"[552] is a transcription of tapes from a "teaching mission"[553] in 1966 to students and staff at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India. "Journey into Joy"[554] records a similar mission in the same venue in 1971. In "Journey into Joy" Newbigin adopts a number of arguments aiming to persuade listeners that the meaning of life is found in Christ. Newbigin's arguments are based on aesthetics and the notion of human temporality and seem to follow a similar line to that of Peter Berger whose book "A Rumour of Angels"[555] was published in the same year. In later writings Newbigin goes on to quote Berger's term "signals of transcendence" which would helpfully describe his use of the *Sensus Divinitatis* in "Journey into Joy" and so Berger's approach to the *Sensus Divinitatis* is worth exploring at this point.

Berger was seeking to link anthropology and theology in a way that would avoid the faddishness of previous attempts which he terms "mood theologies."[556] Berger describes how pessimistic versions of Freudian anthropology generated theologies based on despair and angst and remarks how well these fitted the climate of apocalyptic doom from 1933 until 1945 and he notes how during the 1960s theologians embraced an optimistic secularism. Berger's approach to anthropology and theology was an attempt to provide greater "anchorage in fundamental human experience" that would "offer

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[552] Newbigin(1968)
[553] Wainright describes the audience as "friendly seekers" Wainwright(2000):322
[554] Newbigin(1972b)
[555] Berger(1971)
[556] Berger(1971):69

some protection against the constantly changing winds of cultural moods."[557] It is these fundamental human experiences that Berger describes as "signals of transcendence." Berger defines these as "phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our 'natural' reality but that appear to point beyond that reality,"[558] for example the human "propensity for order" as order endows "the fact of existence with meaning in terms of ends divine and human."[559] Berger argues that as an intrinsic part of becoming "more fully human… we find an experience of trust in the order of reality" and that this is a signal that there is a transcendent creator or sustainer. Berger gives another example "the argument from play"[560] where joyful play, whether of a game or of music, "constitutes a signal of transcendence, because its intrinsic intention points beyond itself and beyond man's 'nature' to a 'supernature.'"[561] Berger argues also that human flourishing most often takes place due to projects such that human existence "is always oriented towards the future" and this future hope is the way that "men overcome the difficulties of any given here and now"[562] and once again religion provides the ultimate context that hope is justified. Berger freely admits that these are not empirical arguments; he describes them as inductive as they start from human experience. Thus Berger's approach is to find in ordinary human experience a point of contact for the transcendental. This approach is adopted by Newbigin and he makes use of the concept of the *Sensus Divinitatis* as a clue to encourage his audience to explore further the special revelation made known in the person of Christ. Berger's approach is in deliberate distinction from Barth's total discontinuity thesis.

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[557] Berger(1971):69
[558] Berger(1971):70
[559] Voegelin, E.(1956) *Order and History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press :ix cited in Berger(1971):70
[560] Berger(1971):76
[561] Berger(1971):79
[562] Berger(1971):80

Conscience

The second tenet of the traditional Reformed position on general revelation is based on the universality of human conscience. In his Institutes Calvin argues that

> "men one and all perceive there is a God, and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own conscience because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will."[563]

This is further elaborated in Calvin's commentary on Paul's Roman epistle

> "they prove that there is imprinted on their hearts a discrimination and judgment by which they distinguish between what is just and unjust, between what is honest and dishonest. He means not that it was so engraven on their will, that they sought and diligently pursued it, but that they were so mastered by the power of truth, that they could not disapprove of it."[564]

There seem to be two arguments here. Firstly the knowledge of God is universally made known such that human conscience is convicted by its inadequate worship of God. This position finds scriptural support in Romans 1:32. Secondly Calvin argues that humans show that God's judgment is known to them by their construction of religious and moral codes that demarcate right and wrong. This position finds scriptural support in Romans 2:14-15. This is not to say that one can find in all people everywhere the same moral codes and values. Peter's first epistle describes the capacity for humans to sear their consciences and Paul in his Roman epistle is not arguing that men have always listened to their consciences as is demonstrated in his conclusion that "there is no difference, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."[565] Demarest comments that "man intuitively knows not only that God values goodness and abhors evil but also that he is ultimately accountable to such a righteous Power."[566]

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[563] Calvin(1559):44 (1.3.1)
[564] Calvin(1539):97
[565] Romans 3:23
[566] Demarest(1982):231

Newbigin's work does not refer often to this theme. In fact even in his early book "Sin and Salvation" where Newbigin devotes five chapters to the preparatory work of God in bringing salvation, he is strangely silent on the idea of the witness of conscience. Newbigin describes a "disharmony within man himself"[567] as a result of the fall of humanity and an existential anxiety due to the contingent nature of human existence,[568] but Newbigin refers only negatively to the role of conscience as a source of general revelation from God stating man's "conscience becomes corrupted, and he does evil things believing they are good."[569] This is of course a reference to Romans 1, where Paul outlines the suppression of the truth from creation, leading to God "giving people over" to their sin.

Newbigin's most significant discussion of conscience comes in "Christian Freedom in the Modern World."[570] This book written during his journey to South India on board the ship *City of Cairo*[571] is primarily a response to "Freedom in the Modern World" by Professor John MacMurray which was gaining wide acceptance in the SCM.[572] Newbigin believed MacMurray's book was compromising the motivation for Christian social involvement as MacMurray sought "in the name of freedom to replace a morality of law, duty, and obedience, which he considered mechanical and impersonal, by a morality centred on friendship and personal communion."[573] Newbigin argued that "the crux of the problem was at the point which had become so central to my thinking: the necessity for atonement."[574] The key chapter in Newbigin's response is called "The Significance of Conscience" in which Newbigin argues that rather than destroying

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[567] Newbigin(1956):21
[568] Newbigin(1956):26
[569] Newbigin(1956):27
[570] Newbigin(1937)
[571] Wainright(2000):240
[572] Newbigin(1985d):39
[573] Wainright(2000):240
[574] Newbigin(1985d):39

humanity's freedom, conscience actually liberates humanity. Newbigin cites the work of the principal of his Cambridge college John Oman arguing that

> "a man with a taboo has begun to rule his own instinctive life within, and begun to rule- or at least to defy the world of circumstance and accident without. He is no longer a product of natural forces."[575]

Conscience in Newbigin's thought is neither infallible nor immutable as a man's conscience is a "faulty instrument, moulded by social and psychological forces, liable to misrepresent and distort God's will; but it is the only conscience he has, and he must obey it, and by obeying educate it to hear more keenly and clearly."[576] Newbigin describes conscience in terms of an immediate non-inferential revelation from God and goes to great lengths to distance himself from any theological position that argues from conscience to the existence of God. He writes:

> "we must beware… of slipping into the thought that God is arrived at by a train of reasoning from the data of conscience. This reasoning is a reflective process necessitated by the challenge of those who deny that God speaks in the conscience, just as the denial that the eye gives us real knowledge of objects may give rise to a process of reflective reasoning on the theory of vision. But sight is not therefore a process of argument and postulation from the data of optics. In both cases the immediate apprehension is primary and reasoning secondary."[577]

The pre-reflective nature of conscience is primary in Newbigin's thought as he seems to be wary of rationalistic approaches to the justification of the knowledge of God. This may be an overreaction and a passing up of a helpful apologetic resource. In contrast to a rationalistic understanding of a God deduced from the existence of conscience Newbigin describes conscience in terms that appear to draw once again on Buber's 'It-Thou' distinction.

> "In conscience we are confronted by another will, another subject challenging and resisting our own will. We are involved in a personal dealing with another

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[575] Newbigin(1937):40
[576] Newbigin(1937):40
[577] Newbigin(1937):41

> will.... it is... the breaking into our consciousness of the new dimension of the infinite personal."[578]

This emphasis on the meeting of the divine person through conscience is rare in theological discussion on the nature of conscience and even at this early stage in Newbigin's work his aversion to rationalistic apologetics because of the danger of arguing for an impersonal demiurge is in evidence. This instinct remains a constant theme in Newbigin's apologetic approach as has been shown in Newbigin's critique of the eighteenth century rationalist apologists in "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society"[579]. Instead Newbigin describes conscience in terms of knowing God's personal will but also in terms of knowing his authority and pleasure.

> "It is the utterance of the divine will for us, the word of God, and it carries with the assurance that to disobey is to choose death."[580]

These words echo Romans 1, which argues that disobedience to the universally revealed moral will of God is known to bring the punishment of death. Thus not only are the demands of conscience universally revealed but also the consequences of disobeying conscience also in "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society" Newbigin states:

> "I believe that no person, of whatever kind or creed, is without some witness of God's grace in heart and conscience and reason, and none in whom that grace does not evoke some response – however feeble, fitful, and flawed."[581]

Here Newbigin argues for conscience as part of God's common grace to all humanity. In his later writings Newbigin does not seem to make much of the resource of conscience in his evangelistic approach. Thus although Newbigin allows theoretical space for God to reveal himself through human conscience there is no attempt to use it as an evangelistic resource. So far the exploration of general revelation has focussed on the intuitional mode of revelation, the convictions that are held *a priori* before any

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[578] Newbigin(1937):47
[579] Newbigin(1989e):10
[580] Newbigin(1937):48
[581] Newbigin(1989e):175

conscious reflection has taken place. The second set of sources for universal divine revelation is the mediated and inferential revelation that comes from reflecting on God's providential ordering of history and his creation.

Providence

Calvin writes

> "the second kind of works, which are outside the ordinary course of nature also, proofs of his powers just as clear are set forth. For in administering human society he so tempers his providence… he still by open and daily indications declares his clemency to the godly and his severity to the wicked."[582]

There is apparent biblical support for providence as a source of general revelation as Luke records Paul in his Areopagus speech saying: "he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and find him."[583] Laying aside God's providential design and sustenance of the world of nature which will be examined later, Paul's appeal to the organization of history is worthy of closer inspection. Calvin comments on this passage that:

> "For when he saith that the times were ordained before by him, he doth testify that he had determined, before men were created, what their condition and estate should be. When we see divers changes in the world; when we see realms come to ruin, lands altered, cities destroyed, nations laid waste, we foolishly imagine that either fate or fortune beareth the swing in these matters; but God doth testify in this place by the mouth of Paul, that it was appointed before in his counsel how long he would have the state of every people to continue, and within what bounds he would have them contained. But and if he have appointed them a certain time and appointed the bounds of countries, undoubtedly he hath also set in order the whole course of their life."[584]

To what extent Paul was arguing for a general revelation and to what extent he was arguing for the sovereign control of God over history is significant. Is Paul arguing that through reflecting on human history one is able to read the hand of divine providence or is he arguing that existentially God so orders an individual's situation in the world that

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[582] Calvin(1559):60 (1.5.7)
[583] Acts17:26-27 some would argue that Acts14:17-18 also points to God's work in providence but it is best treated as part of the work of creation.
[584] Calvin(1560) Volume 2:165

he draws the person to call out to him? The latter seems appropriate in the context. History as a source of general revelation from God is fraught with difficulty[585] and Newbigin although stressing vehemently the historicity of the gospel story does not argue that reflection on history is a source of general revelation. As has been seen in the previous chapter Newbigin uses history and more specifically historiography as an apologetic, but it appears that for Newbigin history as a whole is not equally accessible to all humanity and therefore cannot be cited as a source of general revelation.

Creation

The final tenet of the reformed position on general revelation is the witness of creation to God. Calvin proposes that God

> "revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him."[586]

Two different areas of general revelation through creation will be examined, the first is the design of creation and the second is God's providential sustenance. This distinction is important as it guards against a deistic approach that upholds God as creator but rejects him as sustainer. Both of these elements of revelation are inferential in that rational reflection is expected rather than direct intuitional awareness. The apostle Paul in his evangelistic sermon at Lystra argues that God "has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."[587] Calvin argues that "in the order of nature there is a certain and evident manifestation of God." [588] He then goes on to argue against a proto-deistic or mechanistic approach to the world as he states "even the heaven and earth are not moved or governed by their own motion,

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[585] Dever(1993) & Schluter(1994)
[586] Calvin(1559):51-52 (1:5:1)
[587] Acts14:17-18
[588] Calvin(1560) Volume 1:19

and much less by fortune. Therefore it remaineth, that this wonderful workmanship of nature doth manifestly show the providence of God" [589] Newbigin does not utilise this approach to any significant degree. Instead he assumes that God is creator and argues that revelation is necessary in order to know the purpose for which creation is intended[590]. Newbigin challenges this mechanistic view of the universe by stating: "it is absurd to posit as the ultimate framework of explanation a machine constructed by nobody for no purpose."[591]

Summary of Calvin's position

Calvin's position is influenced heavily by the first chapter of Paul's Roman epistle where Paul argues that all humanity has access to the evidence of God's divine power through the created order. Humanity has no excuse for not responding to God's revelation and is criticised for turning to humanly created idols instead of the creator God. Newbigin argues in "Sin and Salvation" that due to humanity's sinfulness there is a repression of the knowledge of God; the substitution of worship of the true God with worship of idols.[592] In his more mature work, Newbigin has a more positive role for general revelation

> "if we may use the term "general revelation" for the awareness of God which seems to be part of human nature wherever it appears (even when it is suppressed), we have to add that this general revelation, valid as it is cannot communicate the purpose of God."[593]

Newbigin even in pointing out the limitations of general revelation affirms its validity as a source of true knowledge of God. Although Calvin argues for the existence of knowledge of God through the immediate sources of conscience and *Sensus Divinitatis*

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[589] Calvin(1560) Volume 1:20
[590] Newbigin(1989e):
[591] Newbigin(1986c):81
[592] Newbigin(1956):28-29
[593] Newbigin(1989e):73-74

and the mediated knowledge of God through the history and creation/providence, he also writes emphatically about the effectiveness of this revelation:

> "although we lack the natural ability to mount up unto the pure and clear knowledge of God, all excuse is cut off because the fault of dullness is within us."[594]
> "man's nature… is a perpetual factory of idols" [595]

Thus there are noetic effects of sin. Stephen Williams summarises the problem: "sin has affected the will and the will has a certain primacy over the intellect. It is whatever collides with the will that energizes reflection directed against God."[596] This makes sense of Paul's observation in Romans that humanity suppresses the truth that can be known about God, and therefore places itself under the righteous judgement of God.

3.4c The Neo-orthodox debate: Barth and Brunner

From within the reformed tradition the infamous debate between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner is a helpful point of departure for a discussion on the nature of natural theology. It is included here as part of the discussion of general revelation as it is an essential assumption of natural theology that there are universal truths of reason that are accessible to all leading to a knowledge of God. It is also relevant to a discussion of Newbigin's theology of revelation as Barth and Brunner are major influences on Newbigin. This discussion provides a helpful backdrop from which to examine Newbigin's critique of the epistemological syncretism of Christian apologetics to modernist presuppositions.

In the mid-1930's Brunner published an essay entitled "Nature and Grace"[597] a title that echoed Aquinas' dictum that grace did not abolish nature. Brunner argues against Barth's position that "'general revelation' of God in nature, in the conscience and his

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[594] Calvin(1559):68 1:5:15
[595] Calvin(1559):108 1:11:8
[596] Williams(1994):42
[597] Brunner(1946)

history, is to be rejected outright."[598] Brunner argued for an understanding of general revelation that was fully consistent with the reformers and the New Testament theology, denying any place for proofs for the existence of God but arguing for a *Sensus Divinitatis* that remained even after the fall. Brunner sought in "Nature and Grace" to reconstruct natural theology "on a sound Biblical and Reformational basis according to the principles of '*sola Scriptura*' and '*sola gratia*'"[599] and to preserve the dialectical interdependence of nature and grace. This work prompted Barth to write an article entitled simply "Nein!"[600] reacting vehemently against the possibility of any human capacity to recognise God.[601] Part of Barth's vehemence in opposition was due to the use of natural theology to provide ideological support to the national socialism of his day by arguing for natural revelation in the historical process that led to the alleged superiority of the German people. Thus Barth accuses Brunner (I believe falsely) of succumbing to the "theology of compromise."[602] This ideological use of rationality has important implications for an evangelistic epistemology, as this is an essential part of the late-modern critique of the naivety of modern epistemologies.

Barth's rejection of natural theology is motivated by his concern to preserve the uniqueness of the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. Newbigin echoes Barth's opposition to natural theology arguing that in general it was an unwitting acquiescence to modernism's rationalistic tendency. Newbigin with the help of Reventlow's study "The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World"[603] traces the way in which natural theology developed. Newbigin goes on to critique the two-book model of revelation. The two books correspond to nature and scripture, the former providing

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[598] Brunner(1946):20
[599] O'Donovan(1986):436
[600] Barth (1934)
[601] Barth(1934):80-82
[602] Grenz & Olson(1992):84
[603] Newbigin(1989e):1

universally available information about God and the latter providing those truths which could not have been known by reason. Newbigin argues that historically the problem with this model was that eventually the second book lost its place as the standards of reason exercised in the first book are applied to the second book which is then judged to be "full of inconsistencies, absurdities, tall stories, and plain immorality."[604] Newbigin goes on to highlight the unwitting syncretism of the apologists of the time, noting that:

> "what is striking about the books written, especially during the eighteenth century, to defend Christianity… is the degree to which they accept the assumptions of their assailants. Christianity is defended as being reasonable. It can be accommodated within the assumptions, which all reasonable people hold."[605]

Natural theology/religion is based on the strand of modern thought that emphasised the autonomy of human rationality and Newbigin's epistemology seeks to refute this tendency. Natural theology accepted Cartesian rationalistic foundationalism. Newbigin's theological rejection of the autonomy of human reason and his commitment to the nature of special revelation, led to his adoption of an anti-foundational epistemology.

For Barth and Newbigin reason is not an independent source of knowledge of God. As Roland Chia observes, for Barth reason "has only an instrumental, not magisterial, function."[606] This is echoed in Newbigin's reflection on the nature of reason when he states "reason is not an independent source of information as to what is the case."[607] Barth is usually caricatured as rejecting general or extra-biblical revelation, although Scottish theologian John McDowell argues persuasively that this is not the case. Further investigation shows that the essence of the debate was over three significant areas: anthropology, soteriology and ontology.

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[604] Newbigin(1989e):2
[605] Newbigin(1989e):2
[606] Chia(1999):108
[607] Newbigin(1989e):11

Anthropology

Chia argues that Barth's rejection of natural theology is due ultimately to his "rejection of anthropocentric theology – the reductionism of theology to anthropology."[608]The nature of the *Imago Dei* was a major bone of contention between Barth and Brunner. The justification behind Brunner's position on the possibility of human receptivity to revelation through natural theology rested on an exegetical distinction between the image of God and the likeness of God in Genesis 1:26 which Brunner identifies as a formal and a material image. This exegesis is flawed as it ignores the synthetic parallelism of Genesis 1:26.[609] Nevertheless according to Brunner the formal image relates to the *analogia entis*, the "analogous structure of human being to divine being that cannot be destroyed by the ravages of human sin"[610] whereas the material image has been completely lost to sinful man and with it "the possibility of doing or even willing to do that which is good in the sight of God."[611] Chia describes this as a Roman Catholic notion[612] derived from Thomistic theology.

Barth responds curtly arguing that to say the formal image persists is to say no more than "even as a sinner man is man and not tortoise."[613] Barth argues that all knowledge of God is real knowledge and "if we really do know the true God from his creation without Christ and without the Holy Spirit… how can it be said that the *imago* is 'entirely lost.'"[614] Thus for Barth the only point of contact in the image of God in man is the one that is awakened by Christ and the Holy Spirit. Barth rejects the concept of *analogia entis*, arguing for "the infinite qualitative distinction between God and

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[608] Chia(1999):119
[609] A better case for the persistence of the image of God in man can be made from Genesis4
[610] O'Donovan(1986):436
[611] Brunner(1946) cited in O'Donovan(1986):436-7
[612] Chia(1999):111
[613] Barth(1934): 79
[614] Barth(1934):82

man."[615] Because of this distinction "God himself and nothing less than God is the content of his revelation."[616] Thus Barth's anthropology refuses the possibility of any natural knowledge of God. Brunner on the other hand proposes that the opposition of "Nature and Grace" is incorrect. According to Kraemer "the second component here, however must not be nature but *sin*."[617] The reformed position on the fall of man while not utilising the ontological categories of Barth, may concur as there are definitely noetic effects of sin. Barth's rejection of human attempts to understand God independently of God's actions finds an echo in Newbigin where he critiques the fundamental assumption of modern anthropology that:

> "assumed that we are, so to speak, competent to undertake the search for truth- this has been the unquestioned assumption of modernity… here we have come to that part of the whole Christian tradition against which the age of reason most strenuously took up arms… it is reported that he [Jesus] said, "if you continue in my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."(John 8:31). Here we seem to have a direct reversal of one of the axioms of modernity, namely, that freedom of inquiry, freedom to think and speak and publish, is the way- the only way – to the truth. Jesus appears to reverse this."[618]

Indeed Jesus argues that his hearers were in bondage to sin and the only way they could be freed was to become his disciples. By submitting to the reign and tutelage of Jesus, the truth could be known and its liberating power experienced. Newbigin goes on to further expound the noetic effects of sin, stating that:

> "the world is not free as it thinks it is. We are not honest inquirers seeking the truth. We are alienated from truth and are enemies of it. We are by nature idolaters, constructing images of truth shaped by our own desires… our response to th[e] Truth incarnate, a response including all the representatives of the best of human culture at that time and place, was to seek to destroy it."[619]

Again Newbigin's train of thought parallels Paul's Roman Epistle which argues that our response to God's self-disclosure in the created order is suppression of the truth and

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[615] Torrance(1990):136
[616] Torrance(1990):84
[617] Bosch(1977):190
[618] Newbigin(1995i):68
[619] Newbigin(1995i):69

idolatry, and humanity's response to special revelation was the murder of the cross thus revealing the true nature of humanity not to be that of the honest objective observer but of a sin-enslaved evader of truth.

The debate over natural theology is influenced by anthropological assumptions; if human beings are a "*tabla rasa,*" as the more optimistic of the modern thinkers posited, then natural theology would seem a logical possibility. But if the biblical concept of the fall and its noetic effects are understood then this possibility must be questioned. Since the doctrine of election is a key component of Newbigin's theology, at this point it provides a helpful balance to the anthropology assumed in the quest for a natural theology. Newbigin argues that the unexamined assumption in natural theology and in the theology of religions is:

> "that God's efforts at self-disclosure must be directed to each person individually. But the Bible seems to teach consistently that God's gift of salvation… works by the principle of election… human beings are not to be understood as autonomous monads but always as mutually related; that salvation must therefore be in and through this relatedness; that therefore the saving deeds and words must always be mediated through one to another; that is conclusively demonstrated in Paul's argument (Romans 9-11)."[620]

The doctrine of election is central to Newbigin's thought and will be explored at length in chapter four, but here it must be noted that much of the debate over the nature of general revelation assumes a modernist individualism that requires God to make himself equally known in all places, at all times to all people, thus the historical particularity of the Christian faith is offensive. Some of the historical and social antecedents to this position will be examined when Newbigin's doctrine of election is studied more closely.

[620] Newbigin(1983d):208

Soteriology

The second area of contention between Barth and Brunner is soteriology. Kraemer argues that the Barth/Brunner debate is between "synergism and monergism"[621] that is the question whether salvation is a collaborative effort between the soul and God or whether it is a sovereign act of God. Barth maintains a strong dichotomy between nature and grace and therefore rejects the possibility of natural theology. Barth sees natural theology as a movement toward the Pelagian heresy, which stresses human ability, good works and moral endeavour over "grace, faith and spiritual regeneration"[622] and thus undermines the "Reformer's principle of *sola gratia*."[623] McDowell argues that Barth's rejection of all religion (including natural theology) as a "factory of idols" stems from his rejection of the nineteenth century's anthropocentrism. For example Barth argues that the Ritschilians aimed to construct a ramp "so that one may easily ('casually!') climb to the top that is to revelation."[624] McDowell argues that Barth sees a similar tendency in the arguments for the *analogia entis* in Brunner's theology that allows humanity the ability to approach God whether that is articulated in a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian manner and this was the nub of the problem with Barth's assessment of Brunner. Brunner's use of the *analogia entis* downplayed the ontological differences between God and man and espoused "creator-creature continuity."[625]

Ontology

Barth argues that because God is ontologically distinct from all other beings and objects he cannot be known as other objects are known and he therefore argues for a "theological rationality" that is "relatively independent from other forms of

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[621] Kraemer(1977):121
[622] Wright(1994):500
[623] Cited in O'Donovan(1986):440
[624] Barth, K. (1990) *Gottingen Dogmatics: Instructions in the Christian Religion Volume 1, translated Bromiley, G.W.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans:61 cited in McDowell(2002):35
[625] McDowell(2002):43

rationality."[626] Barth makes use of Anselm's slogan: "*credo ut intelligam*" (which itself is reminiscent of Augustine's statement "*nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*"). A common reading of Barth argues for his denial of "all knowledge of God apart from God's own gracious revelation of himself… in Christ… through the scriptures."[627] The common criticism flowing out of this regards Barth's Christocentrism; he is said to overplay the incarnation and underplay the importance of general revelation. Barth's complex theology of revelation cannot be fully expounded here but it is important to note why Christ is so central to Barth's doctrine of revelation. As has been shown, Barth understood that all genuine revelation of God must actually be God himself, due to an ontological difference between humanity and God. This is demonstrated in Barth's revelatory-based doctrine of the Trinity that describes God as "in unimpaired unity yet also unimpaired difference [and] is Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness…These distinctions correspond to Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Scripture".[628] Barth's Trinitarian doctrine of revelation argues that Christ is the location of all true revelation of God hence the Christocentric approach to the knowledge of God. This leads naturally to the neo-orthodox emphasis on revelation as encounter. Robert Preus describes it succinctly stating that

> "God does not reveal something, but Himself. In ordinary personal relationships there is always a blurring of the "thou" and "something" about the "thou."… God does not give us information by communication: He gives us Himself in communion."[629]

McDowell draws attention to the importance for Barth of the idea of truth as personal encounter (a theme that has been demonstrated to be highly significant to Newbigin). McDowell argues that the common reading of Barth's underestimation of general revelation is mistaken, and the general misconception of Barth is confusion over the

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[626] McDowell(2002):34
[627] Holder(2001):24
[628] Barth CD I/1 :344
[629] Preus(1966):113

content of revelation (God's being as revelation that is Christ) and the means of revelation (the scriptures). McDowell also argues that Barth makes critical yet positive use of "extra-ecclesial anthropologies… Mozart's music… and various philosophical elements."[630] This is most clearly stated when Barth writes:

> "God may speak to us through Russian communism, through a flute concerto, through a blossoming shrub or through a dead dog. We shall do well to listen to him if he really does so... God may speak through a pagan or an atheist."[631]

There appears to be a progression in Barth's thought in regards to general revelation, as the concept was flatly rejected in CD II/1, yet by CD IV/3 there is room for "free communications" separate to special revelation in Christ. There are two types that Barth mentions: "lesser lights" and "parables of the kingdom", both forms of "free communications."[632] Lesser lights refer to the flickerings of truth in the "constancies of nature… including the natural conditions of human beings."[633] These display God's glory in such a way that "the witness of these lights of Creation has not been extinguished by the noetic effects of sin."[634] Gunton interprets these 'lesser lights' in Barth's theology as revelatory:

> "there can be revelation because the world is so made that God may be known. In that sense, a doctrine of divine revelation… is supported by a doctrine of creation that holds that the created world is the kind of world within whose structures there can be revelation."[635]

"Parables of the kingdom" describe "unforeseen free communications of God that take place in human history"[636] Barth cites Balaam as an example of someone who received revelation despite being actively hostile to God's people.

> "We recognise that the fact that Jesus Christ is the one word of God does not mean that in the Bible, the church and the world there are not other words which

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[630] McDowell(2002):42
[631] Barth CD I/1:60f cited in McDowell(2002):43
[632] cited in Fackre(1997):126
[633] Fackre(1997):127
[634] Demarest(1987):126
[635] Gunton(1995):33
[636] Fackre(1997):128

> are quite notable in their way, other lights which are quite clear and other revelations which are quite real."[637]

Barth does not reject general revelation as such but rejects natural theology and the key aspect here is the relationship between ontology and anthropology. God must be the source of the revelation; man does not have access to this revelation except through the permission of the Father, the enlightening work of the Spirit and the person of Christ because of his ontological distance from God. A 'formal capacity' to receive revelation in Barth's theology is still rejected as this is seen to limit the freedom of God, thus Barth argues that God

> "elects and creates human beings in Christ to respond to his self-revelation. The 'capacity' or point of contact is, therefore, a Christological and eschatological concept, problematic if divorced from this it can imply a sense of meritoriness."[638]

Demarest notes that "even though Barth later in life made concessions to the illuminatory value of creation, he did not deviate from his lifelong conviction that God reveals himself to sinners only through the Word in its threefold form."[639] This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that in his 1962 theological summary, "Evangelical Theology", Barth made no mention of God's revelation through the created order. This concern to protect the concept of grace and uphold the doctrine of the fall of man and its implications for biblical anthropology must be balanced by the Bible's teaching on the genuinely general nature of the knowledge of God. These concerns must now be addressed.

Newbigin is influenced by Kraemer's[640] approach to general revelation called "Biblical Realism." [641] Kraemer offers a mediating position in the Barth-Brunner debate as he is

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[637] Barth CD IV/3:1967 cited in McDermot(2000):108-9
[638] McDowell(2002):44
[639] Demarest(1987):126
[640] Mike Goheen in a personal correspondence related that one of the only photographs that Newbigin had on the wall in his London home was one of Hendrik Kraemer and himself.
[641] Newbigin(1983d):203

able to see legitimate theological points on both sides. Kraemer's work in this area took place in the context of a debate between himself and A.G.Hogg which was started by the publication of Kraemer's *tour de force* "The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World" in 1938.[642] Firstly Kraemer is quick to point out the contradictory nature of general revelation,

> "Man seeks God and at the same time flees from Him in his seeking, because of his self-assertive self-centredness of his will, his root-sin, always breaks through."[643]

Thus Kraemer seeks to hold in tension the essence of Romans1:18-20 which argues that God has left a true knowledge of himself available in the world such that humanity is without excuse for its ignorance of God, and yet God's wrath is revealed against humanity's wilful suppression of the truth. Secondly Kraemer upholds Brunner's position by arguing that "man can respond to the call of God and consequently is held responsible for his doing so or not."[644]

Thirdly and significantly Kraemer argues along with Calvin that "'general revelation' can only be effectually discovered in the light of 'special revelation.'"[645] He cites Hebrews 11:1 "By faith we understand that the world was fashioned by the Word of God." Kraemer avers that general revelation functions not to provide "preparatory stages" of unbroken lines of religious development ending and reaching their summit in Christ, but "in the light of the Christian revelation to lay bare the dialectical condition not only of the non-Christian religions but of all human attempts towards apprehension of the totality of existence."[646] This is not due to the inefficiency of God but to humanity's sinfulness: "if revelation is constantly in danger of coming to nothing, this is

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[642] Newbigin(1983d):202
[643] Kraemer(1977):126
[644] Kraemer(1977):133
[645] Kraemer(1977):125
[646] Kraemer(1977):125

precisely because of the blindness and inability of man who inverts divine truth and turns it into a lie".[647] There is a dialectic tension in Paul's theology of the knowledge of the unbeliever: "All told, what Paul ascribes to unbelievers is "knowledgeable ignorance," "uncomprehending understanding." The unbeliever both knows and does not know, and there are no categories for neatly distinguishing the one from the other. This "dialectical" dilemma of the unbeliever is the genius of Paul's teaching."[648] R.B. Gaffin argues that

> "Calvin's word-picture is difficult to improve on: Unbelievers are like travellers on a pitch-black, moonless night, after a momentary lightning flash. For an instant the terrain around them has been illumined far and wide, but before they can take even one step, they are plunged back into darkness and left groping about aimlessly. That is the situation of unbelievers, to vary the figure slightly: frozen perpetually in the split second after the firing of a flash attachment in a darkroom—with a blurred and fading, still indelible impression of everything just illumined and yet now no longer seeing anything—knowing and yet not knowing."[649]

Newbigin echoes the dialectical tension between the availability of true knowledge of God and yet humanity's suppression of the truth, however Newbigin does not reject outright the possibility of a universal revelation of God to humanity but he is cautious about its efficacy. Thus Newbigin appears to follow Brunner over Barth in the debate over general revelation, as he writes:

> "wherever human beings are found there are always evidences of some awareness of God, however faint and confused…" [650]

This echoes Brunner's words from 'Nature and Grace'[651]:

> "what the natural man knows of God, of the law and of his own dependence upon God, may be very confused and distorted. But even so it is the necessary, indispensable point of contact for divine grace."[652]

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[647] Bosch(1977):193
[648] Gaffin(1995):121
[649] Gaffin(1995):122
[650] Newbigin(1989e):74
[651] Brunner(1946)
[652] Cited in Grenz & Olson(1992):84

The reliance of Newbigin on Brunner is evident by the overlap of language used. Barth on the other hand argues that there is no point of contact for divine grace and indeed there is no need for one as the Holy Spirit makes his own "which is always a miracle."[653]

3.4d Summary of Newbigin's doctrine of general revelation

Investigation into the historical antecedents to Newbigin's theology of general revelation has shown that although he interacts significantly with Augustine, Calvin and Barth, Newbigin's position cannot be wholly explained in terms of these historical/theological influences. Newbigin does not fit neatly into any of the examined theologies, so Newbigin's approach to the doctrine of revelation will be summarised independently. Firstly, Newbigin is careful not to use the terms "natural theology" or "natural revelation". Bosch argues persuasively that usage of the term "natural" in connection with revelation is unhelpful as all revelation is supernatural in origin, stating: "There is no such thing as a 'natural knowledge of God'… revelation is by definition not natural, otherwise it would be no revelation."[654] This distinction is useful as even as distinguished a theologian as Jurgen Moltman describes a distinction between "natural and revealed theology,"[655] which is confusing at best and at worst argues for a knowledge of God that is not revealed. Instead Newbigin acknowledges that by God's grace genuine revelation is available and to some sense perceived by all humanity. Secondly, there are four means of revelation that have historically been seen to have universal scope; these can be divided into two subcategories as outlined below.

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[653] Grenz & Olson(1992):84
[654] Bosch(1977):192
[655] Moltman(1985):58

Categories of General Revelation	Sources of General Revelation
Immediate / Intuitional	1. conscience 2. *sensus divinitatis*
Mediated / reflective revelation	3. creation 4. providence

Figure 5: Means of general revelation

Newbigin's theology allows for God's general revelation through the *Sensus Divinitatis*, creation and to a lesser extent conscience. He does not present rational arguments for God's existence nor does he cite the history of providence as means of general revelation. Newbigin is wary of placing too much emphasis on this aspect of revelation due to his perception that modernity found the historical particularity of the Christian faith scandalous and offensive, and therefore natural theology came to the fore due to its universality. Newbigin is also quick to point out that general revelation is not able to communicate the purposes of God[656] only the perception of God. Newbigin's position seems to be that general revelation can only be interpreted through the lens of special revelation. This is classic Calvinism which compares the gospel to a pair of spectacles through which the otherwise illegible book of nature can be read. Moltman's position seems to relate closely to Newbigin's:

> "knowledge of the world as divine creation is made possible through the historical revelation of God the Lord. It does not emerge from the mere observation of the world in itself."[657]

So what is the function of general revelation? Moltman outlines three aspects of general revelation:

- Educative – teaching humanity where to look for genuine revelation
- Hermeneutical – "making faith comprehensible. It presents the universal claim that is bound up in the word 'God.'[658]

[656] Newbigin(1989e):61
[657] Moltman(1985):56

- Eschatological – general revelation "belongs to pneumatology: 'the light of nature 'is a pre-reflection of the light of glory."[659]

These three aspects provide a useful framework to examine Newbigin's understanding of the purpose of general revelation.

- Educative

Newbigin's approach allows for general revelation to act as a form of '*praeparatio evangelica*,'[660] providing clues for humanity to seek God. Newbigin makes strong use of the *Sensus Divinitatis* or at least the existential experience of the privation of the presence of God.

- Hermeneutical

Newbigin argues that general revelation and more particularly the *Sensus Divinitatis* is a missionary starting point for evangelism, providing a 'point of contact' with the concept of God. Within every person's hermeneutical circle there is a revelation of God's presence so that the signifier "God" connects with a genuine "signified."

- Eschatological

Moltman sees general revelation not just as an echo of Eden's created order but as a sign of the future glorification of all things. This finds scriptural support in Paul's Roman epistle where the present fallen creation is groaning for its renewal in the new creation. This is a highly innovative approach to general revelation and does not find any resonance in Newbigin's thought. As will be examined in chapter four, it is the church that, for Newbigin, provides the eschatological sign *par excellence* in the present age. However within even Moltman's innovative understanding of general revelation there is little room for another eschatological aspect which is the way that general revelation robs humanity of an excuse for an inadequate response to God at the final judgement. This function of general revelation is a dominant one in patristic exegesis of

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[658] Moltman(1985):58
[659] Moltman(1985):58
[660] Max Warren cited in Bosch(1977):204

this theme.[661] Newbigin argues clearly for the universal illumination of humanity but in the context of judgement, God has not left himself without testimony of his existence and glory and despite this humanity has not responded as it ought.

Newbigin's doctrine of general revelation has now been explored against the background of three major historical theological movements. Before going on to explore the resources for a constructive theology of evangelism, Newbigin's approach to the theology of religions will be examined as this will shed further light on his approach to general revelation and cultures.

3.5 Revelation in non-Christian religions

No discussion of general revelation or culture would be complete in light of contemporary sociological trends without addressing the contentious issue of the possibility of revelation in non-Christian religions. A full-blown exploration of Newbigin's theology of religions is not possible within the confines of this thesis; however this is a highly significant area in relation to general revelation's function in a theology of evangelism as it provides another perspective through which to examine Newbigin's approach to general revelation. This discussion is vital for a theology of evangelism for western cultures for at least two reasons, firstly as was demonstrated in chapter two the ideology of pluralism rules in the west such that all claims to exclusive truth are challenged. Secondly in an increasingly post-Christian society there is an increased interest in non-western religions. In a post-Christian society Christianity is considered part of the old order of things. Research by David Hay[662] has shown that the religious consciousness of British people is as active as ever but that people are unlikely to seek and express their spirituality within institutional Christianity because it is considered dated and obsolete and so many people will express their spirituality through

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[661] Oden(1998)
[662] Hay(2002)

an eclectic mix of non-western religious influences. These factors of a culturally pluralist society, the reigning ideology of pluralism and the rejection of Christianity in favour of non-western religions provide incentive for a brief exploration of Newbigin's approach to revelation in non-Christian religions. Recently evangelical theologians have realised that they have

> "enjoyed the splendid isolation of so much western thought in the modern era as it comfortably worked within the familiar range of categories inherited from our European, Greco-Roman, and Judeo-Christian cultural forebears. The reality of the world's great religions, however, has now become inescapable for all Westerners… as devotees of these religions reside among us as our neighbours, not merely as figures in textbooks or missionary photographs." [663]

Those missionary photographs point to the wealth of historic resources that have accumulated over the centuries of encounter with other religions and Newbigin's missiology offers an opportunity to access these resources in order to construct a theology of evangelism in pluralist western cultures.

3.5a Approaches to dialogue with non-Christian religions

Locating Newbigin's approach to non-Christian religions within a wider spectrum of models will assist the theological analysis of Newbigin's position. Newbigin provides a helpful analysis of Christian approaches to non-Christian religions in his most systematic exposition of his missiology "The Open Secret." In a chapter entitled "The Gospel among the Religions" Newbigin critiques what he sees are the six most common ways of relating Christianity to the non-Christian religions. Newbigin's six categories can be analysed under three groupings relating to approaches to dialogical evangelism. Approaches to dialogical evangelism with adherents to other religions is a good indicator of either an implicit or explicit theology of religions as assumptions are made relating to, amongst other things, the salvific nature of non-Christian religions, the missionary's approach to the interaction between gospel and cultures, and the

[663] Stackhouse(2001):11

missionary's conception of common grace and general revelation. The three approaches of diaological evangelism are: a rejection of dialogue, an embracing of dialogue for relativistic reasons and an embracing of dialogue for evangelistic reasons.

Rejection of dialogue

There are two views that Newbigin explores that fit under this rubric.

- Other religions and ideologies are wholly false and the Christian has nothing to learn from them[664].

The implications of this view of dialogue are obvious, the assumptions are that other religions are non-salvific, that there is a naïve realist conception of the missionaries understanding of the gospel such that through whatever means, be it charismatic Enlightenment or historic tradition, the missionary has nothing to learn about the gospel through cross-cultural/inter-religious dialogue. There is also is a limited or negative approach to general revelation and common grace. This view is a natural extension of a Barthian theology of religions that leads to negation of any point for dialogue; the appropriate response to non-Christian religions is purely proclamation of God's wrath on this idolatry. This position is also found within non-Barthian evangelical frameworks.

- Non-Christian religions are the devil's work and their similarities to Christianity are the results of demonic cunning.

The assumptions of this view are identical to the previous example. This view was espoused by Justin Martyr who made a sharp distinction between pagan philosophy (in which the divine Logos was operative) and pagan religion (in which the devils were operative). Newbigin recognises the existence of the demonic and states that "Religion, including the Christian religion, can be the sphere in which evil exhibits a power against

[664] Newbigin(1985h):169

which human reason and conscience are powerless."[665] Newbigin recognises an element of truth in the idea that similarities to Christianity in non-Christian religions are demonic and uses his oft-repeated observation that "it is precisely at points of highest ethical and spiritual achievement that religions find themselves threatened by, and therefore ranged against the gospel."[666] Newbigin argues that the Jewish religious elite's rejection of Jesus is a case in point[667].

Acceptance of dialogue due to a relativistic approach to other religions

This view accepts the salvific efficacy of non-Christian religions and there is a relativistic approach to the missionary's understanding of the gospel. According to this view there is no definitive reading of the gospel and Christ's exclusive claims are relativised due to appreciating the completely perspectival nature of all truth claims. There is also no necessary distinction between general and special revelation as all religions are equally true as God has revealed himself universally, so there is in effect no such thing as special revelation. This view purports that non-Christian religions are the means through which "God's saving will reach those who have not yet been reached by the gospel"[668]: the means by which God in his grace communicates to all humanity. This is the position of Karl Rahner who has coined the term 'anonymous Christians'[669] for those who are saved by Christ through their own religion.

Acceptance of dialogue for evangelism

Newbigin explores three views that fit under this rubric.

- Other religions are a preparation for Christ: the gospel fulfils them.

This view assumes there is no salvation through other religions except in the sense that they point to their fulfilment in the gospel. There is often a naïve realist approach to

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[665] Newbigin(1995h):170
[666] Newbigin(1995h):170
[667] Newbigin(1995h):170
[668] Newbigin(1985h):172
[669] Rahner, K. (1976):283

gospel truth such that the missionary is not learning through the dialogue except to see another way that God is calling those that do not know him through other religious expression. The missionary is the one with the true knowledge that coalesces well with what the evangelised understood through their own religious and cultural heritage. Also there is a high view of general revelation that operates through non-Christian religions. This view is exemplified in J.N. Farquhar's "The Crown of Hinduism"[670] and was especially popular at the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. Newbigin warns against a simplistic approach to finding fulfilment in Christ from other religions. Evangelicals have often sought shortcuts to get to the gospel message through points of contact in non-Christian religions; a more recent case in point is Don Richardson's book "Peace Child"[671] which provides an example of what he terms 'redemptive analogies'[672] in non-Christian religions. Richardson argues that just as Jesus fulfilled the concepts present in Judaism so he fulfils concepts in the world religions. "The strategy of concept fulfilment can be applied by missionaries today-if only we learn to discern the particular redemptive analogies of each culture."[673] Of course there are plenty of instances where religious systems fail to concur with these authors' understanding of general revelation, normally accounted for as sinful suppression of the truth.

There is a current interest in this approach to other religions in the work of Gerald R. McDermott. In a recent book examining the extensive private theological notebooks of Jonathan Edwards known as the "Miscellanies",[674] McDermott describes how Edwards argued against deist objections to the scandalous particularity of the Christian faith by asserting the typological nature of reality, such that "God had planted types of true

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[670] Farquhar(1913)
[671] Richardson(1974)
[672] Richardson(1976):c-59
[673] Richardson(1976):c-59
[674] McDermott(2000)

religion into the false religious systems."[675] This typological understanding of other religions is known as "*prisca theologia.*"[676] Elsewhere McDermott argues from biblical stories such as Peter and Cornelius and Paul in Lystra that "among the religions are scattered promises of God in Christ and that these promises are revealed types planted there by the triune God."[677] He gives examples such as "the apophatic strain in Thervada Buddhism may remind us Christians of our own tendency toward anthropomorphism."[678] The Spirit can also "use non-Christian religions to induce repentance and awareness of God's judgement."[679]

Kraemer in "The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World" argues persuasively that each religious system must be seen as an integrated whole and to avoid the arbitrary selection of "one element from a whole living system of religion and to use this artificially-isolated element as a point of contact."[680] The dangers of this approach are either syncretism, where the believer from another faith tradition is not taught of the radical discontinuity that Christianity and the previously-held religious faith, or imperialism where the follower of another religion is told that his religion is really a disguised form of Christianity. Bosch argues in a paper critiquing how missionaries often uncritically adopted the local term for "the supreme God" or the creator to present the God of the Bible, and that this uncritical acceptance led to a confusion of God with fate as many African traditional religions saw their creator as inactive and unconcerned with humanity's affairs. Bosch echoes Kraemer's warning over superficial points of contact that refuse to interpret religious ideas within the larger framework of the religion in question. "It is impossible to pick out an idea and a concept there from the

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[675] Strange(2001):37
[676] Strange(2001):36
[677] McDermott(2000):114
[678] McDermott(2000):116
[679] McDermott(2000):118
[680] Kraemer(1977):137

complex world of any given religion and then to use this in the church. Every religion is an indivisible whole…"[681]

Newbigin argues in a similar vein to Kraemer that "each religion must be understood on its own terms and along the lines of its own central axis."[682] But Newbigin argues consistently in favour of a point of contact (he argues in fact that "we cannot preach the gospel at all unless there is some point of contact"[683]) and continuity between Christianity and the non-Christian religions by referring to the practice of the Bible translators. Newbigin makes his position clear in the following quotation:

> "In almost all cases where the Bible has been translated into the languages of non-Christian peoples… Theos has been rendered by the name given by the non-Christian peoples to the one whom they worship as the Supreme Being."[684]

Newbigin goes on to cite the noted missionary-thinker Eugene Nida who provided anecdotal evidence that even where the translators have translated the Hebrew or Greek word for God, converts have simply explained the foreign word by using their indigenous word for God.

- Other religions provide helpful values

This view is related to the previous one and according to the expression of this view popularised at the 1928 International Missionary Conference in Jerusalem it assumes an increasingly ambivalent attitude towards salvation in other religions, and a naïve realist approach to the missionaries' understanding of the gospel. It assumes a high view of general revelation as values are revealed universally, but there is a low view of special revelation as Christianity can be seen as simply the right balance of values.

- The different religions are concentric circles

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[681] Bosch(1973):6
[682] Newbigin(1995h):171
[683] Newbigin(1961b):74
[684] Newbigin(1995h):169

This view again shows ambivalence towards salvation through non-Christian religions, a naive realist approach to the missionaries' understanding of the gospel and a high view of general revelation. Special revelation is found in the Roman Catholic Church at the centre; other Christians, Jews, Muslims at progressively further distances from the centre. Needless to say this view was espoused by the Catholic Church and came to prominence through the papal encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964).

3.5b Newbigin's approach to dialogue with non-Christian religions.

Revelation is not necessarily through the "religious" aspect of life

As has been shown Newbigin argues on the one hand for the unique availability of salvation through the work of Christ, yet he ultimately remains open to salvation without a specific knowledge of Christ. Newbigin has what may be described as a critical realist approach to the missionary's understanding of the gospel. Through inter-religious dialogue Newbigin argues that the process of communicating the gospel cross-culturally is a revelatory experience for the message-bearer. Newbigin has a high view of the doctrine of general revelation such that there are universally revealed truths about God yet uniqueness in the special revelation in Christ.

Religion is not necessarily the point of contact for the gospel

> "The contemporary debate about Christianity and the world's religions is generally conducted with the unspoken assumption that "religion" is the primary medium of human contact with the divine. But this assumption has to be questioned. When the New Testament affirms that God has nowhere left himself without witness, there is no suggestion that this witness is necessarily to be found in the sphere of what we call religion."[685]

[685] Newbigin(1989e):172-173; & Newbigin(1961b):74

Newbigin draws on the patristic theologian Justin Martyr's use of Johanine *logos* theology. Newbigin argues that reflection on the relationship between the gospel and the non-Christian should not be restricted to the religious sphere but to all "other commitments, whether they are called religious or secular."[686] Twenty-eight years earlier Newbigin had argued similarly stating: "It may well be the case that we find the light shining most lucidly in the non-religious elements of pagan culture, in the simple fidelities of home, for instance".[687] Incidentally, Newbigin reflects that the Jesus' parables are notable by the "fact that they speak of secular experiences."[688] This argument seems simplistic, in that Jesus' parables merely use secular life for illustrative purposes to add rhetorical force to his divine revelations. But at another level Jesus' use of analogy is significant. Many of Jesus' parables and metaphors have *a fortiori* logic to them, for example "if you though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, then how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those that ask of him."[689] Many of the parables have an analogical rhetorical intent. For example in the parable of lost coin when commenting on the final celebration Jesus states "in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."[690] But in both these cases the principle of analogical language applies. Jesus is using the secular experiences of his listeners as a point of contact, or common ground as a bridge over which the gospel can be communicated. If Barth is right that there is a radical discontinuity between knowledge of the divine and human knowledge then Jesus' attempts at finding common ground between himself and his listeners are redundant. Jesus' praxis demonstrates that the world per se, not just religious experience, is the context in which God's revelation can be understood. This has major implications for the doctrine of revelation. At one

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[686] Newbigin(1989e):173
[687] Newbigin(1961b):65
[688] Newbigin(1989e):172
[689] Matthew 6:10-12
[690] Luke 15:8-10

level creation provides the context in which God's revelation is to be understood, not in its significance as pointing to a creator, but by providing the concrete linguistic signifiers necessary for communication to take place.

Newbigin argues strongly for the presence and work of Christ outside of the church. John 1:9[691] plays a major role in Newbigin's theology of religions. Newbigin is careful to argue that he is not advocating a relativistic approach such that there is no difference between knowledge and ignorance or between light and darkness. In fact Newbigin can state that evangelism "does not involve any attempt to deny the reality of the work of God in the lives and thoughts and prayers in men and women outside of the Christian church. On the contrary, it ought to involve an eager expectation of, a looking for, and a rejoicing in the evidence of that work."[692] Newbigin is adamant that evangelism must not be wholly negative: "there is something deeply wrong when Christians imagine that loyalty to Jesus requires them to belittle the manifest presence of light in the lives of men and women who do not acknowledge him."[693] Newbigin again affirms that this light of revelation in the non-Christian is not to be restricted to the religious sphere but should include

> "the steadfastness and costliness of the devotion that so often puts Christians to shame; I am thinking also of the no less manifest evidences of the shining of lights in the lives of atheists, humanists, Marxists, and others who have explicitly rejected the Christian message and the fellowship of the church."[694]

There are echoes of Barth's "lesser light" theology, but Newbigin's approach is far more positive than Barth's. For Newbigin these lights provide common ground for Christian–non-Christian dialogue such that "Christians, in their dealings with men and women who do not acknowledge Jesus as lord, will meet them and share with them in a

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[691] Newbigin(1961b):65
[692] Newbigin(1995h):175
[693] Newbigin(1995h):175
[694] Newbigin(1995h):175

common life, not as strangers but as those who live by the same life-giving word, and in whom the same life-giving light shines."[695] Thus Newbigin's approach argues that "the real point of contact between Christian and non-Christian is not in the *religion* of the new-Christian but in his *humanity*."[696] This means that for Newbigin there are revelatory resources available for the evangelist whatever cultural and religious context the gospel is being communicated in.

Dialogue involves mutual learning

Newbigin expects there to be opportunity for the Christian to learn from their non-Christian neighbours and also the chance to work together "in all that serves life against death and light against darkness."[697]This is especially relevant in the light of Newbigin's conversion experience.[698] Having recognised the goodness to be found in every part of humanity, Newbigin balances his assessment by stating that "in the name of all that is best in the moral and spiritual experience of the race, we cut ourselves off from the life God intends for us."[699] Newbigin points to how the best of human spiritual endeavour (Judaism) and arguably the best of human technological power of the time (Rome) combined in the cross to demonstrate "murderous enmity against God"[700] on the cross of Christ.

Bob Robinson describes Newbigin's approach to Hindu-Christian dialogue as "principled ambivalence"[701] as he pays little attention to the finer details of Hindu teaching. However, Robinson does highlight the positive contribution Newbigin makes to Hindu-Christian dialogue, as Newbigin affirms the place of "informal and mundane

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[695] Newbigin(1995h):175
[696] Newbigin(1961b):65
[697] Newbigin(1995h):175
[698] Newbigin(1985d):11-12
[699] Newbigin(1995h):176
[700] Newbigin(1995h):176
[701] Robinson(2002):296

categories"[702] rather than dialogue taking place at the elite religious representative level. Newbigin challenges dialogue on the basis of abstract concepts such as where issues such as "justice, unity and community can be given an ultimate status 'whereas the person of Jesus Christ cannot'".[703] Newbigin instead advocates a Trinitarian framework for dialogue.

Continuity versus discontinuity

It is of no surprise that Barth has influenced Newbigin's approach to revelation in non-Christian religions. Barth contrasts religion from revelation and faith, such that "religion is unbelief"[704], humanity's attempt to hide from God's revelation by fabricating a substitute. This position precludes the possibility of God revealing himself through non-Christian religions. Newbigin does not tackle head-on Barth's critique of religions, but Newbigin's approach is in many ways in direct contradistiction to Barth's thesis. For example Newbigin seems to argue that religions are a form of preparation for gospel reception, or at least part of humanity's response to general revelation. Newbigin cites the fact that the biblical adoption of "El" as a name of God is taken from its extra-biblical Semitic usage. Newbigin argues that the use in the Pentateuch of ancient names for God, such as

> "El Shaddai and El Elyon, and the identification of these names for the God whom Israel knows as Yahweh, shows clearly there is a continuity between the story which the Bible tells and the religious life of the peoples of the ancient world. Every missionary who seeks to proclaim the gospel in a new language has to rely on this continuity. He has to use one of the words which that language already had for God."[705]

Newbigin's argument for some level of continuity between the religions of the ancient near East and Judaism is a radical departure from Barth who emphasises only the discontinuity. But Newbigin is quick to state: "if there is real continuity, as there is,

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[702] Robinson(2002):309
[703] Robinson(2002):309
[704] Cited in Bosch(1977):112
[705] Newbigin(1989e):75

there is also a discontinuity. God has done a new thing, but that does not mean that God was previously absent from the scene."[706] Hunsberger provides another clue to this dialectical tension: he argues that in the 1950s and 1960s the emphasis in ecumenical circles was on "God is at work in the world"[707] and this emphasis "gradually chipped away at the importance of "conversion.""[708] Newbigin's theology, particularly his pneumatology stressed the work of the Spirit in conversion and so it is possible that in wanting to defend the importance of conversion Newbigin over-emphasised the elements of discontinuity and neglected the work of the Spirit in general revelation.

3.6 General revelation as a resource for evangelism in late modern cultures

Newbigin's theological position allows for the possibility of general revelation; for example he can go so far as to argue that when Paul writes to his Gentile audience that

> "'formerly you did not know God.' The fact that they already had a word, several words, for God means that they knew something, even if it is only the sense that 'There is somebody here" which leads to the erection of an altar to an unknown God. But even an unknown god is not nothing.'"[709]

Newbigin's theology is caught in this dialectical tension, wanting to affirm and deny continuity, wanting to argue for the existence of general revelation and yet denying its effectiveness. Thus Newbigin has a recognizably orthodox approach to general revelation; but for the most part he fails to capitalize on the resources his theological position provides for evangelism in late-modern contexts. In this section we will explore possible reasons for such an omission in his work.

3.6a Newbigin's under-use of the doctrine of general revelation

Although Newbigin argues that general revelation is available to all people and that there should not just be a wholly negative relationship between the gospel and any culture, Newbigin's praxis seems to paint a very different picture. We are now able to

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[706] Newbigin(1989e):75
[707] Hunsberger(1998):242
[708] Hunsberger(1998):42
[709] Newbigin(1989e):75

return to the criticisms levelled by Bevans cited at the beginning of this chapter that Newbigin's cultural engagement adopts a counter-cultural model.[710] In his mature missiology, Newbigin can write that in a Christian engagement with non-Christian religions "we shall expect, look for, and welcome all the signs of the grace of God at work in the lives of those who do not know Jesus as Lord."[711] This is a significant statement as it affirms Newbigin's commitment to general revelation as an evangelistic resource. Newbigin is affirming the notion of common grace, and he suggests that it is the starting point in evangelistic outreach:

> "in our contact with people who do not acknowledge Jesus as Lord, our first business, our first privilege, is to seek and to welcome all the reflections of the one true light in the lives of those we meet."[712]

This quotation at first sight could offer the explanation of Newbigin's openness to general revelation and yet his negative evaluation of modernity. The quotation seems to apply to the doctrines of common grace and general revelation at an individual but not at a cultural level. This would allow Newbigin to argue for the work of the Spirit in the individual but not in the culture at large. In other words this is an individualistic interpretation of common grace. Newbigin would not be alone in this approach as at first glance Calvin, Augustine and Barth all seem to apply general revelation in this way. But Newbigin specifically argues that common grace and general revelation is operative in all cultures. For example Newbigin writes:

> "we are called to neither a simple affirmation of human culture nor to a simple rejection of it. We are to cherish human culture as an area in which we live under God's grace and are given daily new tokens of that grace."[713]

There are a number of possible reasons for Newbigin's failure to work this principle out in practice. As been shown, Goheen argues that it was due to the fact that the counter-

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[710] Bevans(2002):117
[711] Newbigin(1989):180
[712] Newbigin(1989):180
[713] Newbigin(1989):195

cultural critique was the missing voice in the ecumenical context but another possibility is Newbigin's lack of a genuinely missionary encounter with modernity.

Lack of a genuinely missionary encounter with late-modernity

It is possible that despite the missionary insights of working on the Indian sub-continent Newbigin did not translate the same approach to his missionary encounter with late-modernity. This would seem particularly ironic as Newbigin is often portrayed as the champion of a missionary encounter with western cultures. Instead of approaching western culture with the humility of learning and dialogue, Newbigin goes on the offensive against the negative influence of the Enlightenment on western societies. How is it possible to understand the change in missionary posture that Newbigin had on his return from India? There is a very significant example that Newbigin gives for how a Christian can relate differently to cultures in different contexts:

> "A North American Christian, for example, highly critical of his own culture and very sympathetic to the relatively strange culture of India, is repelled when he meets a city congregation in India which is relatively unsympathetic to traditional Indian culture and very open to the West."[714]

Ironically this seems to be the exact same tendency that Newbigin's own missiological engagement with Western cultures demonstrates. Could it be that Newbigin had a subconsciously different approach to his host culture than to the missionary situation in India? At one level this is right as good missionary practice involves examining each culture and working out a contextualised approach to mission work in that culture. But at another level due to Newbigin's stated doctrine of general revelation the same resources that Newbigin relied upon in his missionary work in India should hold true as he engages his own culture as a missionary context. There is a hint at this in "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society" where Newbigin argues that there will be a missionary

[714] Newbigin(1978a):14

dialogue "with secular ideologies"[715] but when Newbigin describes this dialogue he emphasises what those holding secular ideologies will learn from the church rather than how this can be a mutually beneficial exchange. It is possible that Newbigin's missionary approach to his host culture was incomplete and there was still a residual commitment to the notion that mission work has a geographical location such that missionary work is from us to them. Recently Newbigin's approach to Hinduism has been criticised by Bob Robinson for being superficial, and ironically Robinson contrasts Newbigin's reluctance to engage with Hinduism "with the degree of vigour and rigour he later displayed in his wide-ranging critique of post-Enlightenment modernity."[716] Robinson goes on to argue that many Indian Christians have misgivings about Newbigin due to "his attitude about contextualisation."[717] Robinson argues that Newbigin was particularly timid about contextualisation and that Newbigin, though he "was not unaware of the inadequacy of much of the received Western shape of the Indian church... seems to have given little constructive attention to the questions of how the church can be rooted in the religio-cultural soil of a given place."[718] Robinson also argues that Newbigin's "appraisal of Hinduism is essentially a negative one"[719] despite a few positive references, for example to the "immense power and rationality of the Vedantin's vision of reality."[720]

Newbigin's lack of positive appreciation for western cultures may also have been influenced by the fact that he originally subscribed to the view of secularisation held by Harvey Cox in "The Secular City."[721] Cox predicted the end of spiritual interest with the further development of modernity. However Newbigin described secularism as "a

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[715] Newbigin(1989e):181
[716] Robinson(2002):296
[717] Robinson(2002):301
[718] Robinson(2002):301
[719] Robinson(2002):306
[720] Newbigin(1982c):ix
[721] Cox(1965)

system of belief... which in principle denies the existence or significance of realities other than those which can be measured by the methods of natural science"[722] and secularisation as "the prising loose of one after another of the elements of human thought and action from the direct control of religious principles."[723] Newbigin describes his own secularist offering a "flirtation"[724] and would later write that the western society is not a secular society but a

> "pagan society, and its paganism, having been born out of the rejection of Christianity is far more resistant to the gospel than the pre-Christian paganism that cross-cultural missions have been familiar with."[725]

Newbigin's description of a pagan society would appear to pave the way for a re-engagement with the work of the Spirit, common grace and general revelation in his approach to western cultures as he is affirming spirituality in those that are unchurched, but this does not seem to have been carried out in practice. Instead, Newbigin's engagement with late-modernity is through a sophisticated critique of western culture utilising the basic framework of the history-of-ideas. For Newbigin it is essentially the Enlightenment that has led to the current sociological and philosophical environment in which the church in the West seeks to fulfil its mission. This approach has not drawn sufficiently on the provision that Newbigin's approach to general revelation could have provided. Although Newbigin undertook a missionary engagement with his missionary-sending culture which was revolutionary, his approach did not seem to go far enough as he failed to make use of the theological resources that he encouraged others to use in cross-cultural missionary work. It is possible that this approach may be due to an unconscious imperialism that applied a different set of theological assumptions to evangelism in non-western contexts. Alternatively, if Robinson's critique holds true, that Newbigin never engaged positively with his missionary context whether in India or

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[722] Newbigin(1966a):8
[723] Newbigin(1966a):17
[724] Wainwright(2000):343ff
[725] Newbigin(1986c):20

in Britian, this would add weight to Bevan's critique of Newbigin as a theologian with an unintentionally "anti-cultural" bias.

The influence of Barth

Another explanation of the lack of use of general revelation in Newbigin's engagement with late-modernity has been shown earlier in this chapter; that is there is an inner tension in Newbigin's theology due to the strong influence of Barth. Newbigin's rediscovery of Barth coincided with his return to the UK. Previously as a student Barth had been "incomprehensible"[726] to him when seeking to understand the book of Romans. But after having worked with Barth in drafting conference briefings at the WCC Newbigin sat down to read "Church Dogmatics". The Barthian influence on Newbigin is marked and Barth's rejection of the possibility of a 'point of contact' impacted Newbigin's theology even though, as has been seen, Barth's work did not eradicate the place of general revelation in Newbigin's thought; however it may well have severely hampered its outworking in Newbigin's theology of evangelism.

3.6b The relationship between general revelation and the gospel

Now that Newbigin's approach to general revelation has been explored, it is time to bring this understanding into dialogue with his approach to the special revelation of the gospel discussed in the previous chapter. There are two areas of analysis: general revelation as preparation for the gospel and general revelation as interpreter of the gospel.

General revelation as preparation

Newbigin highlights the significance of the link between general revelation with the special revelation in Christ when he writes in his commentary on John's Gospel that:

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[726] Newbigin(1985d):85

> "all men, whether they believe or not, live under the light just as they live by the creative word of God. And thus it follows that when a person turns in faith in Jesus Christ he meets not a stranger but one whom he recognises as the one in whom he was loved and chosen before the creation of the world."[727]

Newbigin's trademark reliance on the doctrine of election is here balanced by his understanding of general revelation. Newbigin argues that general revelation has a retrospective significance as the believer can look back and understand that his conversion is not to something alien but to that which he had knowledge beforehand. This does not help to unpack the way that this form of revelation could be used evangelistically, but Newbigin does to some degree utilise the notion that general revelation provides a point of contact.

As has been demonstrated, there is a sense of both continuity and discontinuity in Newbigin's thought on the nature of general revelation and the gospel. So although Newbigin allows for knowledge about God to be derived from the natural world, he denies an interpersonal knowledge of God.

> "If we may use the term general revelation for that awareness of God which seems to be part of human nature wherever it appears (even when it is suppressed), we have to add that this general revelation, valid as it is, cannot communicate the purpose of God for his creation."[728]

As noted previously Newbigin makes regular use of Buber's work and he argues that through general revelation only an I-It relationship is possible, whereas an I-Thou relationship is only possible through special revelation and involves submission to God as a person who must reveal himself to us if we are to know him. Thus for Newbigin

> "If ultimate reality is best understood on the analogy of personal being, or to put it in more familiar terms, if God has created all things and has made human beings in his image, and has never left himself without witness in the mind and conscience of any people, then it will follow that data is available from which it is possible to arrive at the hypothesis that God exists. But between this kind of knowledge and the knowledge that we have of another person whom we know

[727] Newbigin(1982c):6
[728] Newbigin(1989e):74

> and trust personally, there is a radical discontinuity… truly personal knowledge only becomes a possibility when I abandon the sovereign claim of autonomous reason, the claim to know the other person without that person's self-communication in speech and act and gesture…"[729]

This is a highly significant statement of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation; it seems to demonstrate that he allows for the theoretical possibility not just of general revelation but also of natural theology that relies on reason and deduction. This may just be a rhetorical device that allows a point to those that hold a different view to himself as Newbigin has consistently argued that autonomous reason is impossible, and yet here autonomous reason is described as the means by which someone can come to the knowledge of the existence of God. This reading of Newbigin explains how he can argue that this knowledge of God does not lead to a deeper knowledge of God but actually becomes the foundation for a theology that leads away from the knowledge of God as Newbigin goes on to state:

> "Natural theology, in other words is in no way a step on the way toward the theology which takes God's self-revelation as its starting point. It is more likely in fact, to lead in the opposite direction."[730]

Newbigin can make the distinction between general revelation and natural theology as all revelation is God's self-revelation; God allows himself to be known generally but even God's general revelation must be approached with the humility of an "I-Thou" relationship, because once humanity takes on an "I-It" relationship with God the response becomes suppression of truth (Romans 1). This kind of an approach to general revelation does not necessarily entail autonomous reason, but rather a humbled reason responding to the data that God has revealed.

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[729] Newbigin(1989e):61
[730] Newbigin(1989e):61

The gospel as interpreter of general revelation

Demarest states, "special revelation is the necessary supplement and interpreter of general revelation."[731] Through common grace and general revelation God provides interpretive cues for special revelation. For example through the universality of conscience God's special revelation of his righteous requirements finds resonance in moral experience. God's word concerning humanity and their relationship with the creation finds resonance with revelation through the created order. Paying attention to the relationship between general and special revelation provides a safeguard against a deistic approach to special revelation that overemphasizes pneumatology in general and the concept of illumination and regeneration in particular. As D.E. Johnson argues in his paper on the relationship between general revelation and hermeneutics,

> "general revelation comes first, providing the context into which special revelation speaks and makes sense."[732]

This is the opposite of the gospel priority that Peter Jensen describes in his recent reworking of the evangelical doctrine of revelation[733]. For Jensen there is a priority given to the gospel both in terms of authority and chronology. The question arises of which has chronological priority in evangelism: special revelation or general revelation? One possible solution is to adopt a dialectical relationship between special and general revelation where the gospel provides the lens through which general revelation is brought into focus and the gospel answers the existential and logical questions posited by general revelation. But equally general revelation provides the context for receiving the gospel; this could be the moral and epistemological framework that makes possible the process of biblical hermeneutics or the immediate awareness of the God that the gospel describes and his moral requirements. Thus Newbigin writes:

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[731] Demarest(1982):251
[732] Johnson(1998):78
[733] Jenson(2002)

> "Christ is hidden in the world, Christ is the judge of the world. To meet Christ we have to go into the place where apparently he is not, that is into the world which lies in the hands of the evil one"[734]

Recently in his ecclesiological treatise "Church, World and the Christian Life" Nicholas Healy presents a radical approach to the relationship between gospel, church and cultures. Healy is heavily influenced by Hans Urs von Balthasar's theodramatic theory, which argues that Christianity is best thought of "in terms of a play."[735] Balthasar places "considerable emphasis on the dramatic existence of the church as it responds and fails to respond to its call to play its part within the theodrama".[736] But most significantly for this thesis, Balthasar argues that the non-Christian world is equally involved in the theodrama. Healy argues

> "within a theodramtic perspective the non-church world becomes theologically laden, for it cannot be understood as independent of God's activity. And since the Holy Spirit is present and active not only within the church but in what is non-chruch, sometimes a fruitful relation – though one that must remain thoroughly tensive – can arise between church and non-church."[737]

For example one could interpret the ending of Apartheid in South Africa as a move of the Spirit outside of the church, which impacted a racist church situation. There was a sea change in South African culture that had a positive influence on the church, bringing the church to a more biblically faithful witness. Healy's approach allows a more positive approach to late-modern cultures than Newbigin provides.

> "The non-church world is thus not only the place where the church is to witness to its Lord, it is also a place from which the church may learn about its lord and about true discipleship."[738]

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[734] Newbigin(1959):86
[735] Healy(2000):54
[736] Healy(2000):65
[737] Healy(2000):69
[738] Healy(2000):69

This is not pure syncretism as Healy argues for a 'tensive' relationship. Newbigin's model allows for this relationship between gospel and culture, but in practice Newbigin does not adopt it in late-modern contexts.

3.7 Implications

3.7a General revelation: a solid point of contact in a liquid context

General revelation offers helpful resources for evangelism in the late-modern context. The immediate general revelation of the *Sensus Divinitatis* and God's moral requirements allow the proclamation of the gospel to find a starting point in the experience of an unbeliever. Newbigin alludes to this in the cross-cultural missionary setting when the gospel is coming to a culture for the first time.[739] The idea of a supreme being already present in the worldview of the people being evangelised is used by Bible translators as a point of contact for the gospel. But in the post-Christian West how are the resources of the *Sensus Divinitatis* and conscience to be utilised? Newbigin offers only fleeting glances of what this would look like. The apologist Francis Schaeffer, also seeking to relate the gospel to late-modernity, made good use of general revelation in his evangelistic and apologetic method. Schaeffer, like Newbigin, hails from a reformed theological background. Schaeffer was strongly influenced in his thinking by the presuppositional apologetic style of his mentor Van Til who taught Christian apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, and shares with Newbigin a rejection of the claimed objectivity of empiricism, a coherentist rather than a foundationalist epistemology and a theological commitment to the noetic effects of sin. Schaeffer also shares weaknesses with Newbigin in his understanding of culture and commitment to the "history-of-ideas" approach. Despite all of these similarities with Newbigin, three examples of Schaeffer's approach will highlight the differences in their apologetic approaches.

[739] Newbigin(1989e):75

Image of God as point of contact

> "even with a non-Christian, the Christian has some way to begin: to go from the façade of the outward to the reality of the inward, because no matter what a man says he is, we know who he really is. He is made in the image of God."[740]

Schaeffer's apologetic approach to late-modernity is based on theological premises relating to common grace and general revelation. The above citation demonstrates that, according to Schaeffer, because humanity is made in God's image, this is the point of contact for the evangelist. Schaeffer does not define the term "God's image", but his approach assumes that despite a person's stated beliefs, the evangelist appeals to that which God has revealed about all humanity.

Creation as point of contact

> "There is common ground between the Christian and the non-Christian because regardless of a man's system, he has to live in God's world."[741]

Schaeffer appeals to the common ground between believer and unbeliever due to their common environment. God's world in its created order provides the context for human life, and although human interpretive systems may perceive the world differently there is enough of a 'point of contact' provided by the general revelation through this common environment to allow the created order to act as a bridge-point for gospel communication. Schaeffer notes that many people live their lives without acknowledging the lordship of Jesus and yet they live under the shelter of Christian principles and presuppositions to make life bearable. Schaeffer advocated a deconstructive approach in evangelism that deliberately took away the Christian shelter worldview exposing the person to the logical conclusions of their non-Christian presuppositions. This process is described as "taking the roof off."[742]The intention of this process is: "not to make them admit that we were right in some personally superior

[740] Schaeffer(1990):338
[741] Schaeffer(1990a):138
[742] Schaeffer(1990):140

way… but to make them see their need so that they will listen to the gospel."[743] Schaeffer assumes that trying to live in God's world without the Christian worldview will prepare the person to receive the gospel.

Conscience as point of contact

"our whole generation… know they are lost"[744]

Schaeffer uses the sting of conscience as a starting point in evangelism appealing to the guilt that westerners experienced, differentiating between culturally imbued guilt feelings from genuine guilt. The existential guilt experienced by human beings provides an opening for gospel communication across cultural/worldview differences.

Here is an evangelistic approach from a reformed background that seeks to apply insights from a reformed theology of general revelation to evangelistic practice. It is worth asking why this is not present in Newbigin's work to the same degree, despite Newbigin's common theological heritage. This may well be due to Barth and Kraemer's influence: Barth's opposition of general revelation and the more nuanced but equally negative approach of Kraemer.

There is a tension in Newbigin's theology that theoretically accepts the presence and effectiveness of general revelation but refuses to make use of it in evangelistic practice. As a result there is little interaction between Newbigin's doctrine of general revelation and his approach to special revelation.

3.7b General revelation as the ultimate context

General revelation and common grace may be used to provide a theological explanation of the possibility of human communication and especially cross-cultural communication

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[743] Schaeffer(1990a):139
[744] Schaeffer(1990):181

where notions of the incommensurability of competing worldviews/interpretative frameworks is taken for granted in much contemporary discussion on the nature of language and communication. For example in the field of literary criticism Jacques Derrida has argued against logo-centrism, the belief in an ultimate ordering of reality. This profound scepticism is based on the assumption that perception of reality is always mediated through language, indeed "it is a central deconstructionist theme that we can never get to a pre-linguistic or pre-conceptual reality"[745] Because of the role of language in cognition and the disbelief in the intrinsic meaning of words, deconstructionists hold to Nietzsche's position of the metaphorical nature of truth:

> "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms… truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their picture and now matter only as metal"[746]

Claims to a definitive reading of a text are seen as a tyrannical attempt to legitimise and impose on others a particular viewpoint. Deconstructionists aim to expose traditional interpretations as manipulative. For Derrida "there is never and cannot be any true transfer of meaning"[747] as there is "no proper context to provide proof of a final meaning."[748] This position can be challenged at a number of levels, including the self-contradictory nature of all claims of the impossibility of transferring meaning. But general revelation as the larger context in which every text must be read offers a theological framework to argue for the possibility of communication. General revelation can provide enough overlap between individual and communal hermeneutical circles that human cross-cultural communication though not perfect is still possible. This has implications that common grace and general revelation always play an important part in providing the context whenever scripture is read.

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[745] Middleton & Walsh(1996):33
[746] Neitzche, F.(1954) "On Truth and Lie." Kaufmann,W.(ed.) (1954) *The Portable Neitzche.* (New York: Viking Press) :6-47 cited in Sire(1995):101
[747] Osbourne(1991):382
[748] Lechte(1994):109

Conscience as moral meeting ground

Michael McKenzie notes that ethicists such as Jeffrey Stout and Alasdair MacIntyre

> "have made an imposing case that there really is no tradition-free vantage point from which to do ethics, no "moral Esperanto" which is spoken by all. Are believers then with no common ethical language, no way to point to the right course without being so tradition-bound that Christian conversation becomes a monologue?"[749]

McKenzie argues that general revelation provides the context for the church to perform accessible acts of virtue that will be interpreted through the generally revealed moral requirements of God. This approach provides resources that dovetail with Newbigin's emphasis on the church as a hermeneutical community and the necessity for the church to re-enter the public arena in his Gospel as Public Truth[750] project. It is in the light of general revelation that non-believers are able to interpret the church as the hermeneutic of the gospel and there is a genuine possibility of dialogue in the public arena. Surprisingly Newbigin does not make use of conscience in this manner in his call for the church to reverse the trend of the privatisation of the Christian faith. The persistence of conscience even in a distorted form could be used to argue for the reformed approach to evangelism of preaching law first and the gospel as an answer to the ensuing moral crisis. This approach to evangelism models itself on the line of argument found in Paul's Roman epistle.[751]

3.7c (Re)contextualisation

There is an apparent tension between affirming a context-independent revelation of God available through common grace and on the other hand arguing that scripture provides context-dependent models of gospel communication. Two New Testament examples of the gospel coming to gentiles may provide clues as to how this tension can be resolved.

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[749] Mckenzie(1997):43
[750] See Newbigin(1991g)
[751] Achteimer argues for a similar approach based on his reading of Mark's gospel. Achtemeier(1990):47ff

In the book of Acts Luke provides examples of the preaching of the early church, which appear to be included to provide models of contextualised gospel communication. When the gospel comes to Lystra[752] Paul uses arguments from general revelation to provide a context for preaching the person and work of Christ.[753] The point of contact for Paul is his hearers' experience of God's providence through the created order. However in Athens Paul appeals to the knowledge of God the creator that pagan poets had correctly identified. Paul adapts his message in different cultural contexts despite the fact that he is using general revelation as his point of contact. Human responses to general revelation seem to be influenced by personal and corporate factors. Donald Carson describes how "both our own sin and the sin that has driven our culture to adopt its limited plausibility structures (and the two loci of sin are not entirely separate of course, since individuals constitute the culture) are blinded and morally reprehensible."[754] Thus the noetic effects of sin account not only for an individual's response to God but also to a culture's level of receptivity. Cultures are affected by both general revelation and the noetic effects of sin, such that each culture is a unique mixture of these two elements. This would account for the similarity in Paul's strategy with gentiles in Athens and Lystra and yet the difference in methodology.[755] Therefore belief in a general context-independent revelation of God does not imply that contextual factors are unimportant in evangelistic communication.

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[752] Acts14:8–18 and 17:16–34 contain notable similarities. "In both Lystra and Athens, the Apostle adapts his preaching to his audience by assimilating a more or less Greek view of the universe." Charles(1995):52

[753] "pagans had first to be taught what Jews already confessed regarding the unity and character of God." Bruce(1988):277

[754] Carson(1995):184

[755] An evolutionary approach to Paul's preaching is rejected, the difference between Paul's preaching in Athens and Lystra is not due to trial and error but due to the different contexts. Luke deliberately explains the Athenian context in terms of academic speculation in order to draw a contrast with the rural setting in Lystra.

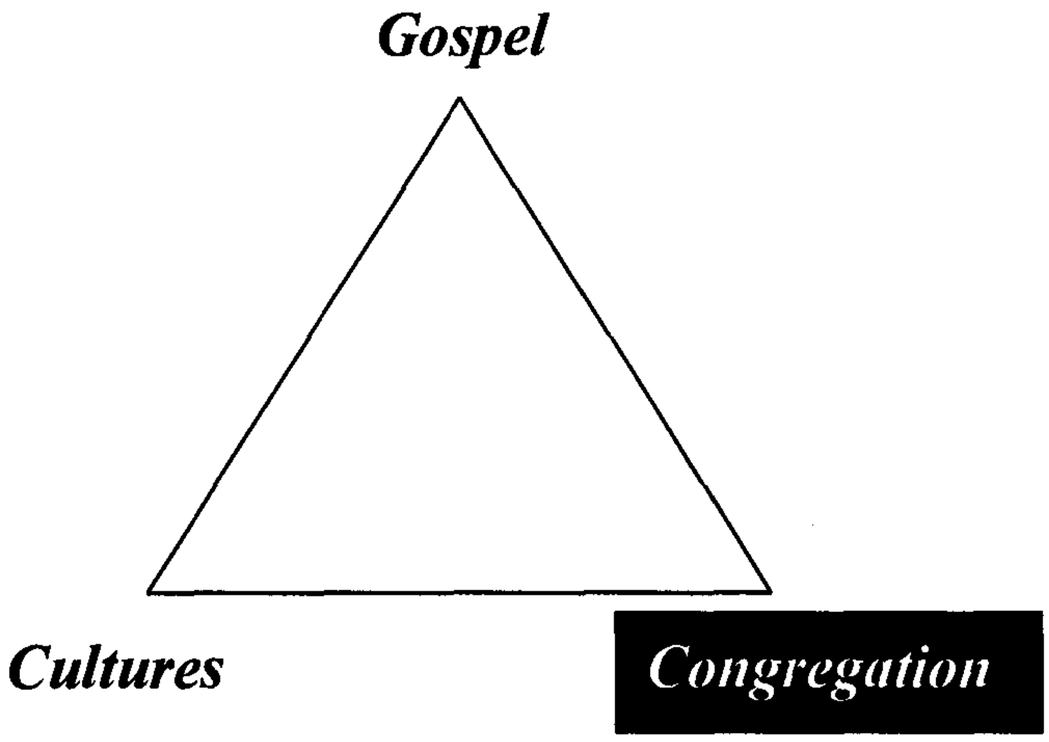
3.8 Summary

This chapter has begun to explore Newbigin's implicit theology of evangelism by examining his approach to cultures and to the doctrine of general revelation. Newbigin's approach to general revelation has been set within the context of historical theology and his reliance on Augustine and Calvin as well as his interaction with Barth and Brunner have been noted. Newbigin's theology allows for the possibility of a genuine revelation of God to be received by all humanity through the intuitional sources of *Sensus Divinitatis* and conscience and the inferential source of creation. Newbigin's under-utilisation of this resource has impoverished his evangelistic engagement with late-modernity. Significantly Newbigin's cultural critique has taken on a predominantly negative stance to late-modern cultures despite his conviction that God communicates in and through all cultures.

Chapter 4

THE GOSPEL AND CONGREGATION

- Newbigin's ecclesiology and late-modern evangelism



This thesis has adopted Newbigin's trilateral model of missionary communication between congregation, cultures and gospel as the framework through which to dialogue with Newbigin's doctrine of revelation in order to construct a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures. The final corner of Newbigin's communication model is the congregation and it is to this area we now turn.

Newbigin's ecclesiology provides a powerful resource for constructing a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures for three reasons. First, late-modernity can be seen as a turn away from the individualism of modernity and a "turn to relationships."[756] The church's syncretistic relationship with modernity and especially Enlightenment

[756] Grenz(2004):252

rationalism has often led to individualistic and rationalistic evangelistic praxis.[757] Newbigin's deeply ecclesiological conception of the doctrine of revelation leads him to posit a fundamentally ecclesial and therefore communitarian conception of evangelism. Second, late-modern thought has deconstructed modern conceptions of truth as both individualistic and naively optimistic about objectivity and has recognised through the insights of the sociology of knowledge the role that social conditions play on belief formation and preservation. Newbigin's ecclesial approach to the doctrine of revelation leads him to develop an evangelistic model that undercuts much of the critique of the sociology of knowledge. Thirdly, late-modern cultures are increasingly cynically disposed towards truth claims and often look for authenticity through praxis. In a world of spin doctors Philip Turner describes "the powerlessness of talking heads."[758] Modern models of evangelism, for example the heavy emphasis on personal evangelism, crusades and para-church organisations, often divorced the gospel from the corporate witness of the church. Newbigin's ecclesial approach to evangelism intrinsically links evangelism with the authenticating witness of the local church community.

The relationship between the doctrine of revelation and ecclesiology has a particularly strong emphasis in Newbigin's theology which is evident right from the earliest extant example of his theological project, Newbigin's (unintentionally) programmatic essay, "Revelation." Here Newbigin argues that God reveals himself through the election of a chosen people through which the rest of humanity is to be exposed to the gospel. There is a central thrust in Newbigin's doctrine of revelation, which is present right back in the 1936 essay, and persists through to the end of his writing career. This central thrust is the intrinsic link between revelation, ecclesiology and evangelism in Newbigin's thought.

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[757] Metzger(1984):17
[758] Turner(2002):73-93

Ecclesiology is central to Newbigin's theology of evangelism: he writes:

> "it is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. I think we Protestants cannot reflect too often on this fact. He committed the entire work of salvation to that community."[759]

It is something of this 'inexhaustible significance' that this final and pivotal part of the thesis seeks to expound. As has been shown Barth's work on the doctrine of revelation provides theological credibility in exploring the church's proclamation as part of the doctrine of revelation, but Barth does not locate his ecclesiology in general under the rubric of the doctrine of revelation; he draws a distinction between the church's proclamation and the church's life. Newbigin on the other hand provides a direct link between the doctrine of revelation and the very existence of the church. This may be explained by Newbigin's intrinsically missionary ecclesiology.[760] The centrality of ecclesiology to evangelism should be apparent, as this thesis has followed Newbigin's recurrent and central line of thought that God's special revelation comes through the election of a people. That the church is the mediator of the gospel bears important theological implications and leads to the implication that it is the church in general and the local congregation in particular that is the primary vehicle for evangelism. There are vast theological and epistemological implications to this conclusion that will be explored in this final section of the thesis. Newbigin's appropriation of the work of Polanyi and to a lesser extent Berger and MacIntyre have demonstrated the need for tutoring in the tradition of the Christian narrative, or to put it another way, the need for an indwelling of the language game of Christian revelation and the way that the church community provides the plausibility structure in which the gospel is considered reasonable. The role of general revelation provides the wider context in which to interpret the ecclesiologically proclaimed and enacted gospel narrative. These factors all

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[759] Newbigin(1953):27

[760] See doctoral thesis Goheen(2002) "'*As the Father has Sent me, I am Sending you': Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology.*"

point towards the need to ground evangelism in an ecclesiological setting. As Abraham laments in his groundbreaking theological examination of evangelism, "above all, what is important is to combat the isolation of evangelism from the full ministry of the church and to rescue it from the shallow anthropocentrism and individualism into which it has tumbled in the last two centuries."[761]

The central point of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation is that special revelation is mediated through the church community. For Newbigin this insight is intrinsically linked with his emphasis on election. Because special revelation calls the people of God into being and commissions them to proclamation, ecclesiology is included under the rubric of revelation. As will be demonstrated the people of God are not only the means of revelation but actually part of the content of the revelation. The whole life of the church has an evangelistic dimension therefore it is safe to include the whole of ecclesiology as part of the doctrine of revelation. The mediating role that the community provides is fourfold: firstly the gospel forms the community that is to communicate it in the world and thus the role of the church as missionary community is examined. Secondly, the church in its life and practice provides the credibility or otherwise of the reconciliation promised by the gospel and so the church as reconciled and reconciling community will be examined. Thirdly, the church provides the foretaste of the things promised in the gospel and thus the church as eschatological community will be examined. Fourthly, the local congregation provides the hermeneutical context in and through which the gospel narrative is understood and thus the role of the church as hermeneutic of the gospel will be examined. Although the whole life of the church, indeed even the miracle of its existence, is revelatory, not all the activities of the church are intentionally revelatory. Evangelism is to be understood as the intentional aspect of the church aimed at communicating the gospel of God. Evangelism, though central to

[761] Abraham(1991):69

the church's existence, is still a subsection of the church's overall mission; thus evangelism is examined under the rubric of revelation but within the context of ecclesiology. This final chapter will first identify Newbigin's definition of the church and compare it with traditional approaches to ecclesiology and then present a four-fold structure to map Newbigin's ecclesiological approach. This exposition will allow for a critical dialogue with late-modern cultures and demonstrate the resource that Newbigin's ecclesiology provides for a contextualized theology of evangelism.

4.1 Defining the church

4.1a Marks of the church – Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is the standard starting point for a discussion of ecclesiology, proclaiming "one holy catholic and apostolic church" (*ecclesia una, sancta, catholica et apostolica*). These four marks appear to provide "essential characteristics"[762] rather than a definition of the church. These marks have often been debated but in general due to the Nicene Creed being one of the earliest they have been widely accepted by Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants. Howard Snyder argues that these four marks are highly ambiguous and have been interpreted very widely: he cites how Wesley interpreted them in a way consistent with his concern for "the spiritual vitality and evangelistic vigour of the church."[763] Classical Roman Catholic ecclesiology interpreted the apostolicity of the church in terms of apostolic succession and unity in terms of standardised doctrine. Charles Van Engen, the church growth exponent, reinterprets the marks of the church to support a church growth directed ecclesiology.[764] Snyder himself, drawing largely on the epistle to the Ephesians argues that the marks of the church must not be taken in isolation, for example when discussing the unity of the church he argues that the church must be "many and one" as overemphasis on the

[762] Snyder(2003):82
[763] Snyder(2003):85
[764] Snyder(2003):85

church's unity underplays the church's intrinsic diversity of ethnicity and spiritual gifts. Snyder goes on to demonstrate that the church is "charismatic and holy", "universal and local", "apostolic and prophetic."[765] These brief considerations show that the historic marks of the church are inadequate as a standalone definition of the church.

4.1b The Reformation

Bosch argues that the first "official description" of the church was composed in 1530 and is found in article eight of the Lutheran Augsburg confession. Bosch considers this the first definition due to the fact that up until the Reformation the Church of Rome had never needed to define itself. (Apparently even during the Great Schism in the eleventh century the nature of the church was never brought into question). Protestant definitions were, in their turn, attempts to justify their idea of the church against Rome.[766] The Reformation marks of the true church were, "the pure preaching of the Word and the correct administration of the sacraments."[767] (Bosch fails to mention the third mark popular in reformed churches which is right-ordered discipline.[768]) Bosch finds this Reformation definition of the church reactionary, negative and static. It is reactionary as it was formulated in order to exclude the Roman Catholic Church of the time, negative as it seeks to exclude Roman Catholicism rather than positively and comprehensively define the church and static as it describes the church as a venue or theatre for preaching and the sacraments. Newbigin also argues that though no one would wish to argue that any of these reformed marks are wrong, they are reductionist,[769] giving the impression that the church is an event, where preaching and sacraments take place; if this approach is followed the conception of the church as essentially a weekly meeting easily holds sway. Thomas Oden attempts a mediating position stating that where "the word is

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[765] Snyder(2003):86-87
[766] Bosch(1978a):28
[767] Bosch(1978a):28
[768] Snyder(2003):82
[769] Newbigin(1953):132

rightly preached and sacraments rightly administered and discipline rightly ordered will be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic."[770] But even this does not provide an adequate definition.

4.1c Contemporary evangelical ecclesiology: Miroslav Volf

Evangelicals have often been criticized for holding an inadequate ecclesiology; in fact some have argued that the term "evangelical ecclesiology"[771] is an oxymoron. It is therefore worth investigating the work of an evangelical who in recent years has sought to redress this lacuna in evangelical theology. Miroslav Volf defines the church utilising Matthew 18:20 as the "foundation not only for determining what the church is, but also how it manifests itself as a church."[772] Despite the prestigious history of the use of this passage to define the church there are exegetical problems in using this well-worn text as the basis of ecclesial identity. The context of the statement "that where two of three are gathered there am I among them" (Matthew 18:20) relates to the exercise of church discipline; there is no indication of authorial intent to form an ecclesiological definition through this text. Matthew's gospel is the most vocal of the four gospels about the church and this passage comes within a pericope emphasising the need for right relationships within the church and the necessity of church discipline. The emphasis is on the authority of the church to exercise this discipline and Matthew writes that the agreement of a small group of believers is sufficient to provide legitimacy of the decision to expel the immoral brother. Indeed in antiquity Cyprian the Bishop of Carthage warns against using this verse to provide theological justification for a reductionist and schismatic ecclesiology when he states: "just as they have cut themselves off from the church, so they cut up the sense of a single passage. For our

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[770] Oden(1992):298
[771] Hindmarsh(2003):15
[772] Volf(1998):136

Lord was urging his disciples to unanimity and peace."[773] Nevertheless Volf argues that justification for the use of this text is based on the "persuasive power" of his "overall reading of the New Testament and [his] ecclesiological-systematic outline."[774] Volf argues from this text that the act of assembly is of paramount importance for the church. He qualifies this with "the life of the church is not exhausted in the act of assembly… in its most concentrated form, however the church does manifest itself concretely in the act of assembling for worship, and this is constitutive for its ecclesiality."[775] Volf goes on to state that an assembly is not yet a church as "an indispensable condition of eccelsiality is that the people assemble in the name of Christ."[776] For Volf this implies that those that gather: "hold fast to the apostles teaching" about Christ; "attest that [Christ] is the determining ground of their lives"[777] and express faith in Christ that is demonstrated in fruitful lives.[778] Once Volf has established that meeting in the name of Christ is constitutive of the church he is able to import through this statement most of the classical reformed distinguishing marks of the church for example: "in so far as baptism and the Lord's Supper mediate salvific grace, they are constitutive for the church."[779] Volf is also able to import the normative four classical marks of the church, for example he creatively and insightfully argues for the unity of the church by arguing that the assembling of each local church is a foretaste of the "eschatological gathering of the people of God"[780]and then concludes that no local church can ever in isolation from all other churches claim to be a church. Volf can summarise his approach to the ecclesiality of the church by stating that:

> "Every congregation that assembles around the one Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord in order to profess faith in him publicly in pluriform fashion, including through baptism and the Lord's Supper, and which is open to all churches of

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[773] Caecillius Cyprianus "The Unity of the Catholic Church" cited in Humphrey(2003):135
[774] Volf(1998):137
[775] Volf(1998):137
[776] Volf(1998):145
[777] Volf(1998):146
[778] Volf(1998):147
[779] Volf(1998):153
[780] Volf(1998):156

> God and to all human beings is a church in the full sense of the word, since Christ promised to be present in it through his Spirit as the first fruits of the gathering of the whole people of God in the eschatological reign of God."[781]

Thus Volf offers an alternative, creative and convincing definition of the church, despite overloading the text Matthew 18:21 with a theological burden the text was never intended to bear. Having outlined three attempts to define the church, Newbigin's own approach to ecclesiology can now be explored.

4.1d Newbigin's definitions of ecclesiality

Newbigin does not aspire to be a systematic theologian and his *ad hoc* theological approach is both frustrating and refreshing. By seeking to integrate Newbigin's various definitions of the church, a map for exploring Newbigin's approach to revelatory ecclesiology will be constructed. Newbigin offers three working definitions of the church, which will be explored in turn.

The Assembly of God

Newbigin draws on Karl Schmidt's analysis of the 'ecclesia' in Gerhard Kittel's "Theological Dictionary of the New Testament."[782] In the "Household of God" Newbigin cites Schmidt when he recognizes that the word "*ecclesia*" means nothing more than a "gathering or a meeting" and because it is always stated or assumed that it is "*ecclesia theou*" (God's assembly), the ecclesia is a unique gathering because God brings the church into being. Newbigin's deduction from Schmidt's essay is that the church is a visible congregation by alluding to the choice of the early church to use the word 'ecclesia' and not 'synagogue'. Firstly, Newbigin argues that

> "ecclesia was almost universally adopted – the word which in normal secular use referred to the public assembly of all the citizens gathered to discuss and settle the public affairs of the city. In other words the early church did not see itself as a private religious society competing with others to offer personal salvation to its

[781] Volf(1998):158 (italics from original)
[782] Schmidt (1965)

> members: it saw itself as a movement launched into the public life of the world… claiming the allegiance of all without exception."[783]

Newbigin's emphasis on the public nature of the church is in deliberate contradistinction to the Reformers' emphasis on the invisible church. Secondly Newbigin draws out from Schmidt's essay the fact that the church is God's assembly and thus it is the sovereign work of God constituted by the Holy Spirit.[784] The "church itself is the visible company of those who have been called by Him into the fellowship of His Son."[785] The emphasis on the church as the elect people of God is a crucial theme in Newbigin's thought and is always articulated within the context of the revelatory mission of God through the church. Newbigin demonstrates a general accord with Volf's theological position; indeed both authors refer extensively to Schmidt in seeking to define the church.

Provisional incorporation into Christ

Newbigin defines the church as "the provisional incorporation of humankind into Jesus Christ."[786] Goheen in his doctoral thesis on Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology claims Newbigin first coined this definition in 1973.[787] However he fails to recognise that the foundation for this formulation was laid in the 1959 paper called "The Gathering Up of History into Christ"[788] in which Newbigin argues "we must interpret this drawing together of all peoples into an irreversible movement in terms of the apocalyptic teaching of the New Testament, in terms of the fact that world history is in the grip of Christ, is being propelled towards him…"[789] and thus the congregation is a "visible

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[783] Newbigin(1980d):46
[784] Newbigin(1953):27
[785] Newbigin(1953):27
[786] Newbigin(1988b):30
[787] Goheen(2000):171
[788] Newbigin(1959)
[789] Newbigin(1959):83

sacramentally-centred fellowship drawing all men together in the name of Jesus."[790]

Goheen also fails to note the Barthian echo in this ecclesial definition. Barth writes

> "The Christian Church, as the body of Jesus Christ and therefore the earthly-historical form of his existence, is the provisional representation of the humanity sanctified in Him."[791]

Thus for Barth the church has an exemplary role because of its eschatological status. This is a theme that Newbigin explores in some depth and will be examined in the section 'the congregation as eschatological foretaste.' Newbigin's conviction that the church universal is the provisional incorporation of humanity into Christ leads him to conclude that the "issue of Christian unity is the most central and critical one for the mission of the Church."[792] This approach to ecclesiality is radically Christocentric and provides a complementary conception to Volf's definition that emphasises the presence of Christ in the church, whereas Newbigin emphasises the presence of the church in Christ. Newbigin and Volf's definitions in concert provide a perichoretic conception of the relationship between Christ and his church. Although perichoresis is a term that is most commonly used in connection with inter-Trinitarian relationships to signify the mutual indwelling of the members of the Godhead, its original usage was at Chalcedon referring to the way that the two natures of Christ interpenetrate one another. The term is used at this point of the thesis to refer to the mutual interpenetration of Christ and his church. Bosch described Newbigin as a particularly Johanine theologian[793] and the language of John 17 is the most likely biblical source material for Newbigin's definition. The lack of Trinitarian emphasis is significant, but the Johanine source texts supplement Newbigin's theological shorthand such that one could see how this provisional incorporation is accomplished by the Spirit and that the ultimate goal is the

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[790] Newbigin(1959):89
[791] Barth(1958)CD IV/2:719
[792] Newbigin(1959):89
[793] Bosch(1989):88

coming reign of God. Goheen notes that the church is not only related to Jesus but also inextricably related to humankind:

> "it is not a private organization for the benefit for those who adhere to that particular brand of religion. The church is … the first fruits of a harvest of the new humankind. She is *pars pro toto*, the part for the whole."[794]

For Newbigin the church is provisional, not yet as she will be and not the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei*; the church does not exist for herself but she is missionary by her very nature as she exists for the benefit of the whole of mankind. The church is also in some sense secondary to the coming kingdom of God, and an eschatological sign. Newbigin defines the church as provisional in two senses

> "firstly in the sense that not all humankind is so incorporated; and… in the sense that those who are so incorporated are not yet fully conformed to the image of Christ." [795]

Thus Newbigin's emphasis on the provisional nature of the church is an eschatological and missiological statement. The church is also essentially relational, as the church is a provisional incorporation into Christ, intimately related to the person of Christ. This definition of the church also carries a strongly revelatory emphasis, as it is through the church's provisional and anticipatory incorporation into Christ that the divine consummation is revealed in the present.

Locus of the Holy Spirit's witness

"…the Church is the place where the Spirit is present as witness."[796]

Newbigin most clearly expresses a pneumatological ecclesiology in the third and seminal chapter of the "Household of God" where he analyses the previously undervalued and underutilised Pentecostal and charismatic contributions to ecclesiology. In contrast to the emphasis on apostolic succession in Catholic

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[794] Goheen(2000):171
[795] Newbigin(1988b):30
[796] Newbigin(1980d):38

ecclesiologies and faithfulness to the apostolic gospel for Protestant theologians, Newbigin offers a complementary approach by focussing on the presence of the Spirit as a defining mark in the church; indeed in a similar way that the presence of the Spirit drove the recognition of non-Jewish Christians to the apostles in the book of Acts. Newbigin writes, aware of the WCC debates relating to the ministry of the Spirit in the world outside of the church, yet arguing that the presence of the Spirit is the defining ecclesial marker. This approach when brought into concert with the Protestant emphasis on right confession, and the Catholic emphasis on historical continuity offers an invaluable accountability, because the presence of the Spirit confirms the sovereignty of God over the body of Christ. The church is not simply a sociological or ideological institution, but owes its existence to the indwelling presence of God's Spirit. But once again Newbigin's revelatory focus is evident as he defines the church as the place where the Spirit not just is present but bears witness.

Church and congregation

Newbigin's triangular theory of missionary communication, which has provided the overall structure for this thesis, has an ecclesiological inconsistency. Newbigin's original model labels the ecclesiological corner "church culture"[797] and Hunsberger's model renames it "church" [798] and yet this thesis has further reassigned this corner "congregation." The terms church and congregation are obviously not theologically interchangeable, nor are these terms used interchangeably in Newbigin's theology. The decision to use congregation rather than church is influenced by Weston's serious criticism of Newbigin's ecclesiology that at first glance jeopardises the use of the church as a conduit of divine revelation. Weston draws attention to Newbigin's insistence that it is the church universal that engages in this missionary trialogue with host cultures and the gospel. Weston states that Newbigin due to "adopting Polanyi's

[797] Newbigin(1995h):147
[798] Hunsberger(1998):238

framework has the effect of 'homogenising' the diverse cultural and ecclesiologial factors."[799] According to Weston, Newbigin is overly optimistic as to the degree of unity in the universal church's understanding of the gospel and openness to cross-cultural dialogue. It seems hard to maintain that Newbigin was unaware of the extent of the diversity of church cultures and theology due to his enormous experience through the ecumenical movement, indeed "The Household of God" is a discussion of the issue of the divergence in Protestant, Catholic and Pentecostal conceptions of the church. Nevertheless Newbigin argues that the term church be assigned to the ecclesial corner of his model. Newbigin may well have been referring to the third corner as a representation of the ecumenical dialogue within the worldwide church that would apparently help him to admit the diversity within the global church whilst arguing for the unity of the church's task of mission. This reading is still problematic as the cultural corner of the triangle could also represent an internal dialogue between global cultures, but no such provision is made within the model. Similarly it is optimistic to suppose that each time a local congregation is involved in mission that it represents the global church in dialogue; there are far too many parochially minded congregations for this to be realistic. Nevertheless Newbigin's model of missionary communication remains an excellent resource for a theology of evangelism if the local congregation is taken to be the third corner of the triangle rather than the global church. This substitution would bypass Weston's criticism of the homogenising tendency in his ecclesiology and would also bring the model closer to the emphasis that Newbigin places on the local congregation as the primary missionary agent.

Newbigin's emphasis on the local congregation is significant. He argues persistently and persuasively that the local church is the most basic unit of missionary action, countering the individualism of much evangelical evangelism and also the traditional

[799] Weston(2001):309

churches emphasis on the church universal. Newbigin's ecclesiology keeps in creative tension an emphasis on the church universal with the conception of the church as the provisional incorporation of humanity into Christ, and the church local with the articulation of the church as visible congregation. The definition of the church as the locus of the Holy Spirit's witness could be seen as a mediating definition as it works at both a universal level, as ultimately God's people are defined by the Spirit's presence, but also at a local level, as the congregation is the missionary unit of the church empowered for this task by the presence of the Spirit himself.

A novel analytical framework for Newbigin's ecclesiology

Even from this brief exploration of Newbigin's working definitions of the church, the importance of the revelatory role of the church is evident and the dominant themes emerge, namely the eschatological, ecumenical, pneumatological and missional dimensions. Many have undertaken to describe Newbigin's ecclesiology, most notably Goheen's doctoral thesis: "As the Father has Sent Me"[800] which emphasises the intrinsically missionary conception that drives Newbigin's ecclesiology. Hunsberger reads Newbigin's ecclesiology as a subset of his doctrine of election. This thesis has used Newbigin's doctrine of revelation as the hermeneutical key to unlock Newbigin's theological project and so in contradistinction to Hunsberger locates Newbigin's ecclesiology not ultimately within his doctrine of election but within his doctrine of revelation. Due to Newbigin's lack of systematic articulation his ecclesiology will be explored using a novel model of analysis using three overlapping circles. The three circles represent the congregation as united body, the congregation as missional community and the congregation as eschatological foretaste. The crucial fourth and ultimately integrating theme is the church as pneumatologically empowered hermeneutic of the gospel. Newbigin has a deliberately Trinitarian ecclesiology, so it is

[800] Goheen(2001)

fitting that an ancient symbol of the Trinity; the so-called 'Triquetra', should provide the best diagrammatic map of his ecclesial reflection. The first advantage of this diagrammatic representation is that it demonstrates how the different aspects of Newbigin's ecclesiology profoundly influence one another. Thus it will be shown that for Newbigin unity, eschatology and the missionary nature of the congregation are intrinsically linked. The second advantage of this schematization of Newbigin's ecclesiology is that it shows the essential unity of Newbigin's ecclesiological project and once again demonstrates the doctrine of revelation as Newbigin's theological centre. The conception of the church in general and the local congregation in particular as the spirit-empowered community through which the gospel is revealed is crucial to Newbigin's ecclesiology. This communication of the gospel is the driving force behind Newbigin's ecclesiological reflection so Newbigin's ecclesiology is ultimately evangelistic.

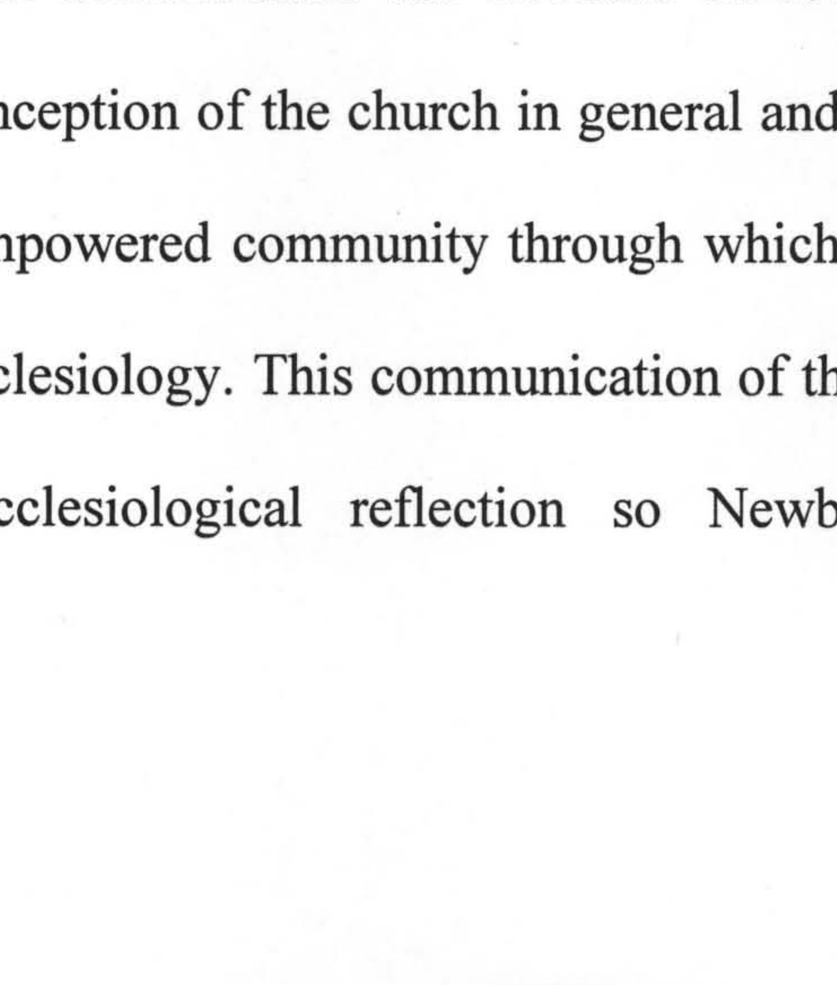
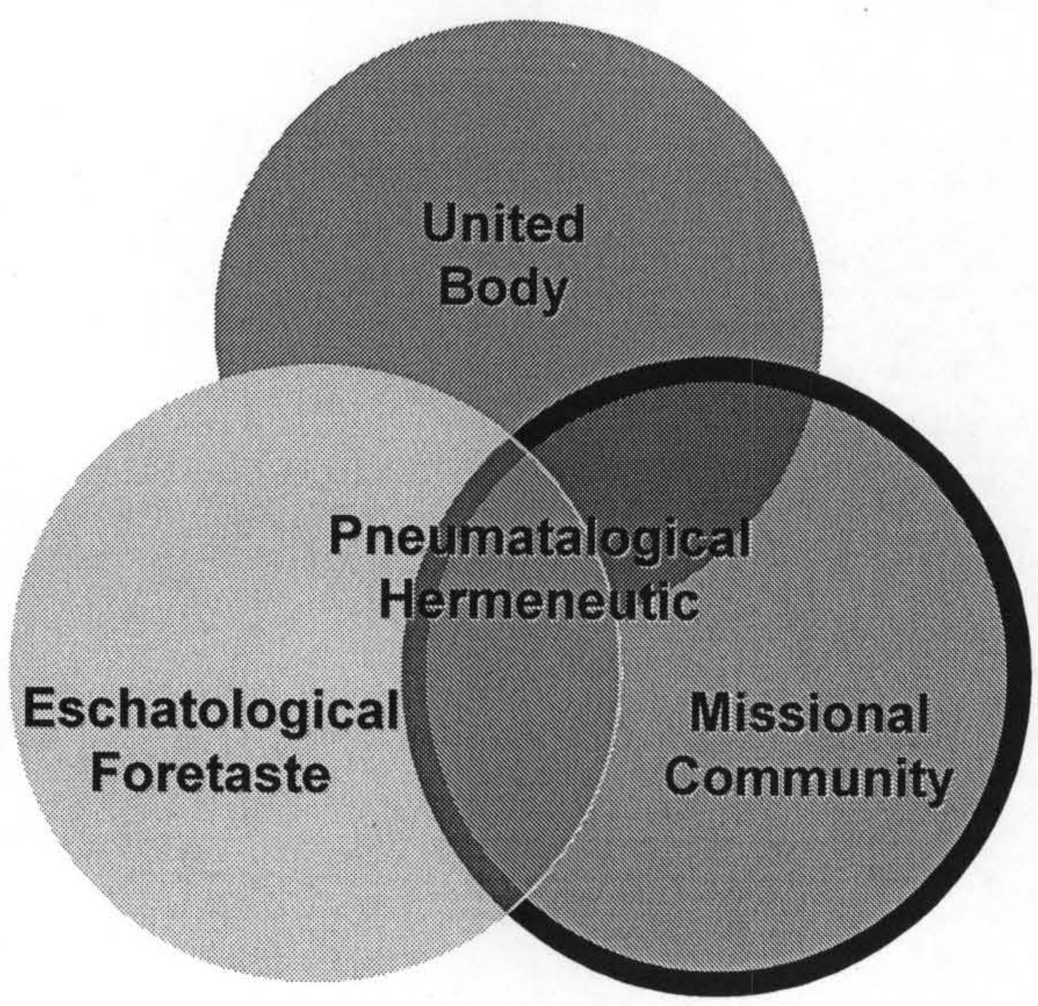


Figure 6: Newbigin's multifaceted ecclesiology

Figure 6 will provide the structure for the rest of this chapter where each of the four labelled segments will be examined, the interaction between these themes in Newbigin's ecclesiology will be discussed, and the implications for the ecclesial dimension of a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures will be explored.

4.2 Emphasis One: The congregation as missional community



The first aspect of the fourfold analysis of Newbigin's ecclesiology is to explore his articulation of the congregation as a missional community. The missionary nature of the congregation links ecclesiology directly with the doctrine of revelation as the congregation seeks to intentionally become the locus for the witness of the Spirit to the gospel of Christ. This section focuses on the *raison d'être* of God's community and particularly Newbigin's understanding of the historical and theological factors that have affected the church's understanding of its missional role in the world. Newbigin's approach offers the opportunity for congregations to rediscover their identity in a post-Christendom context where Christianity has lost much of its cultural significance and has become "intellectually and culturally marginal."[801]

4.2a Newbigin's doctrine of election

The idea of the universal church as intrinsically involved in God's mission in the world is central to Newbigin's whole theological project and is linked to his conception of the very nature of salvation itself and particularly his formulation of the doctrine of

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[801] Reno(2002):39

election. Newbigin often criticises the traditional understanding of election arguing that the church has interpreted the doctrine

> "as if it meant being chosen for special privilege in relation to God, instead of being chosen for special responsibility before God for other men."[802]

Newbigin argues that:

> "During the Christendom era, the church developed the self-understanding that it existed 'for the edification and sanctification of its own members rather than for witness and service to the world outside.'"[803]

Vital to Newbigin's understanding of election is the fact that God's chosen people are called not simply to enjoy the benefits of salvation but to participate in the *Missio Dei*. Hunsberger's doctoral dissertation explores the significance of this theme to Newbigin's missiology arguing that:

> "Newbigin is persistent and relentless in pressing how centrally necessary election is in the scheme of things."[804]

The theme of election is present right at the start of Newbigin's theological articulation. In his seminal essay "Revelation" Newbigin argues that because

> "the meaning of man's life is in fellowship... we can understand the immensely significant fact that revelation which is the key to our highest blessedness does not descend to us straight from heaven, but has to reach us passed from hand to hand of our fellow men along the chain of a historic community."[805]

Thus Newbigin's understanding of the doctrine of election is informed by his doctrine of revelation and his soteriology. Newbigin argues that the divine purpose in history is "not a collection of individual spirits abstracted one by one from their involvement in the world of matter and in the human community and set in a purely spiritual relationship to himself"[806]. Because authentic human life is by God's intention

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[802] Newbigin(1966a):101
[803] Newbigin(1961b):111
[804] Hunsberger(1998):48
[805] Newbigin(1936):2
[806] Newbigin(1953):99

communal, the gospel speaks of reconciliation between God and humanity but also between humans themselves, with both a horizontal and a vertical aspect to salvation. This correlates with Newbigin's multi-relational approach to salvation explored in chapter two. There is a fundamental assumption in Newbigin's missiology that the congregation is the mediator of divine revelation and he is adamant that there is an inner logic to God's electing purpose that centres on the congruence between the message of the gospel and the medium of the congregation through which it is communicated:

> "A gospel of reconciliation can only be communicated by a reconciled fellowship… it will be communicated by the way of election, beginning from one visible centre and spreading always according to the law that each one is chosen in order to be the means of bringing the message of salvation to the next."[807]

The mediatory role of the congregation is crucial both to Newbigin's apologetic approach but also central to his doctrine of revelation. The scandal of the historical particularity of the gospel is not an embarrassment for Newbigin's missiology, as it is a central tenet that is entirely consistent with God's overall purpose. God's *modus operandi* corresponds to God's *telos*. God's purpose is to reconcile humanity with himself through the gospel of Christ but the means by which this reconciliation is revealed is through mediation of the church. Thus election is "particular in order to be universal."[808] People must be brought into fellowship with the congregation in order to be brought into fellowship with God, thus in the process of coming to know the gospel, the convert is brought to know the community of God. Newbigin avers that because salvation is social the means of propagating salvation is social too and it is this congruence between the nature of human existence, the gospel, salvation, mission and the church that helps Newbigin respond to the scandal of historical particularity which has been an objection against evangelism in the modern era and is just as much of a scandal in late-modernity as truth claims are viewed as power claims.

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[807] Newbigin(1953):141
[808] Newbigin(1961b):82

Newbigin's formulation of the doctrine of election in terms of missionary responsibility is in marked contrast to the prevalent evangelical conceptualisations of this doctrine. Election is typically treated by systematic theologians under the rubric of the application of redemption and is expounded in individualistic terms relating to providing assurance of salvation to the believer. For example in the popular evangelical systematic theology of Wayne Grudem election is defined as

> "an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, only because of his sovereign good pleasure."[809]

Although Grudem recognises both God's sovereignty and grace, election is seen primarily for salvation and there is a low ecclesial dimension as the elect are simply "some people." Grudem goes on to defend predestination (but not double predestination) and his application is in terms of salvation being received humbly by grace not through works. Grudem presents the doctrine of election predominantly as "a comfort to believers,"[810] and as a motivation to evangelism only as it provides a guarantee of success. Newbigin's approach to election is inherently missiological and also inextricably linked to his doctrine of revelation. This has been demonstrated by the fact that Newbigin's doctrine of election is most often articulated as a response to the question from the Hindu[811] who asks why God does not reveal himself universally. Hunsberger notes the apologetic setting of Newbigin's doctrine of election:

> "He begins with the question asked by one outside the Christian faith looking in."[812]

Newbigin has an "outside in" approach to election, using election as a central part of his apologetic, whilst Grudem has an "inside out" approach to give assurance to Christians.

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[809] Grudem(1994):670
[810] Grudem(1994):673
[811] Newbigin (1999):4; (1989e):67; (1961b):79
[812] Hunsberger(1998):94

Newbigin's "election-for-mission" approach may appear to be instrumentalist, but because Newbigin's theology argues that election is both the means and the ends of salvation this is unjustified. The elect are chosen to participate in the *Missio Dei* and are brought closer in fellowship with God and with his people, both of which constitute the blessings of salvation. Thus for Newbigin the oft-questioned authority for the church to preach the gospel is "the fact that God has chosen it for this purpose."[813] The existence of the church is intrinsically linked with the *Missio Dei* and therefore the church is missionary by its very nature and purpose. Newbigin often cites Brunner's adage "As fire exists by burning so the church exists by mission."[814] Newbigin notes that the letters of "Paul contain so many exhortations to faithfulness but no exhortations to be involved in mission."[815] He argues that this is due to the fact that the church "not merely has a mission; it *is* a mission"[816] in fact Newbigin states when "the church ceases to be a mission, then she ceases to have any right to the titles by which she is adorned in the New Testament."[817] The church is locus for the mission of the triune God.[818] Newbigin illustrates this point stating:

> "the light cast by the first rays of the morning sun shining on the face of a company of travellers are not the source of that witness but only the locus of it. To see for oneself that it is true, that a new day is really coming, one must turn around, face the opposite way, be converted. And then one's own face will share the same brightness and become part of the evidence."[819]

Thus Newbigin's conception of the church as a missional and eschatological community "bearing the witness of the Spirit," is incorporated into the conception of the

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[813] Hunsberger(1998):81
[814] Newbigin(1953):142 nowhere does he give a reference for this citation
[815] Newbigin(1989e):119
[816] Newbigin(1961b):93
[817] Newbigin(1953):143
[818] Newbigin(1989e):119
[819] Newbigin(1989e):120

congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel. This approach to the ecclesiology is reminiscent of Hauerwas who argued

> "the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church – the servant of the community. Such a claim may sound self-serving until we remember that what makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world. As such the church does not have a social ethic: the church is a social ethic."[820]

This may seem a sectarian approach to ethics. Indeed Samuel Wells argues that for Hauerwas "the Church is an end in itself."[821] However, Wells does qualify this by arguing that this only works for Hauerwas "so long as one understood that serving the world was part of the definition of 'Church'… [as] being a distinct community that practices the truthful politics of peace is the chief way that the Church serves the world in general."[822] Hauerwas is part of the post-liberal movement and his ecclesiological reflection shares some commonality with other post-liberal thinkers such as John Howard Yoder[823], George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson and others. Newbigin's ecclesiology also shares a great deal with post-liberal ecclesiology, especially with regard to the church as alternative communal discourse. Healy describes this approach as the "new ecclesiology", a movement of thought that explores

> "the ecclesiological implications of the view, initially developed by Wittgenstein, that we are who we are, and we know and can live in the world around us, because we have been inculturated into particular ways of life embodied in distinctive communities in which certain language games and forms of life are performed and learned."[824]

Newbigin's ecclesiology does track a similar course but not through interaction with Wittgenstein but rather through interaction with the philosophies of Polanyi, Berger and MacIntyre and with the theology of Karl Barth.

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[820] Hauerwas(1983):99
[821] Wells(2000):101
[822] Wells(2000):102
[823] Yoder(1994b)
[824] Healy(2000):287

4.2b Challenges to a missional conception of the church

Newbigin argues that much of the malaise in the church's missionary praxis is due to the church's lack of missionary self-identity. Bosch notes that a comparison of the self-conception of the New Testament and contemporary Western churches demonstrates that the church has changed from a movement into an institution. Bosch follows Richard Niebuhr[825] (who himself was following Henri Bergson) who cites essential differences between movements and institutions, which are summarised in the table below:

Institution	**Movement**
Conservative	Progressive
Passive	Active
Reactive	Proactive
Anxious	Risk-taking
Guards Boundaries	Crosses Boundaries

Figure 7: Comparison of institutions and movements

Bosch argues that the institution's tendency to static and formal structures needs the renewal of a movement's "voices of protest"[826] in order to avoid suffocation. On the other hand, the dynamic tendencies of movements need the solidity and breadth of the institution in order to avoid distraction and dissipation.[827] Bauman argues that late-modernity involves the liquidification of the solidity of modernity[828]. At this point it is appropriate to note that the church as institution has been consistently rejected by western culture and it appears a matter of some urgency to rediscover the idea of the church as movement in late-modern contexts. Recapturing a vision of the church in general and the local congregation in particular as a missional community will help in

[825] Niebuhr(1959):11
[826] Bosch(1990):51
[827] Bosch(1990):51
[828] Bauman(2000):6

this process but there are two major challenges to this. The first is the Christendom model of the church and the second is linked historically to a reaction against the acceptance of the Christendom model, the advent of para-church organisations.

4.2c Newbigin and Christendom

It is important to explore Newbigin's understanding of the Christendom model of church as he has come under criticism for his supposed advocacy of a return to Christendom in public life. The term Christendom is being used to represent "the idea of a professedly Christian secular political order."[829] This definition is borrowed from the political theologian Oliver O'Donnovan who uses the term "secular" deliberately to refer to things in "this passing age (*saeculum*)."[830] Newbigin agrees that a very significant shift in the church's self-understanding took place with the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in AD312, which Newbigin understands to be beginning of the Christendom era. Although Constantine's conversion is a landmark event in church history Lamin Sanneh argues that it may be more accurate to describe Constantine himself as "a potent personal symbol"[831] of the Christendom era rather than the founder of the Christian empire:

> "for he was too preoccupied with his personal rule in a diverse multicultural empire to think about a cohesive, unitary institution like Christendom. Rather it was the Carolingians… who made territoriality a rule of religious life and made the principle of political organisation the 'unrestricted adhesion of the western church to the Empire.'"[832]

It is noteworthy that although the AD313 edict of Milan Christian religious freedom was guaranteed by the state, a paradigm shift occurred with the decree of Emperor Theodosius in AD380 as "the orthodox faith, as represented by the Bishop of Rome and the Patriarch of Alexandria, [became]… the only religious form permitted in

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[829] O'Donnovan(1996):194-195
[830] O'Donnovan(1996):211
[831] Sanneh(1993):186
[832] Sanneh(1993):186

Europe."[833] This edict demonstrates a paradigm shift in mi. sion when the mission of the church and the mission of the state became synonymous. Bosch along with many other contemporary missiologists[834] provides a wholly negative evaluation of the Christendom era for the church. For example he describes how under Christendom the church transitioned from being movement to becoming an institution:

> "The small disparaged community developed into a large, influential church; the persecuted sect in time became the persecutor of sects and dissidents; the bond between Judaism and Christianity was finally severed; an increasingly close liaison developed between the throne and the altar; it became a matter of form to belong to the church; preoccupation of the immortality of the soul replaced the expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God; the gifts of the Spirit were largely unrecognised; the ecclesiastical offices became institutionalised; the church became wealthy and no longer quite knew what to do with the message of Jesus… Christian doctrine and practice became increasingly fixed in rigid moulds."[835]

Newbigin on the other hand has a more sympathetic approach arguing that:

> "It is customary to speak of the conversion of Constantine (whether in fact it was genuine or "diplomatic") as one of the major disasters of Church history. This judgement is made today from within a culture which has almost completely removed Christianity from the public into the private sector…"[836]

> "we have to accept as matter of fact that the first great attempt to translate the universal claim of Christ into political terms was the Constantinian settlement."[837]

> "we cannot disown all that we have inherited from the thousand year experience of the medieval *corpus Christianum.*"[838]

Newbigin argues that the church would have been abdicating its responsibility if it had not seized the opportunity to demonstrate Christ's reign in all spheres of life.[839] It is this sympathy towards Christendom that leads some to accuse Newbigin of having "a desire

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[833] Bosch(1978a):102
[834] See Hall(1997)
[835] Bosch(1980):4
[836] Newbigin(1983):32
[837] Newbigin(1980d):47
[838] Newbigin(1986c):130 for similar sentiments see Harvey(1999):80-81
[839] Newbigin(1986c):101

to return to a past Christendom."[840] For example, David M. Stowe's reading of Newbigin leaves him with the impression that:

> "Newbigin would cut the knot of conflicting opinions about purpose and value by having decisive pre-eminence and power assigned to a particular religion of which he approves – Protestant Christianity of a generally ecumenical sort."[841]

This charge is refined and more accurately expounded by Sri Lankan theologian S. Wesley Ariarajah in his post-script to "The Other Side of 1984."

> "Bishop Newbigin is not asking for a state run by the Church or for the Christian faith to be recognised as state religion. What he wants is a society whose economic, social, political and educational organisation is based on the values and perspectives drawn from biblical faith. But the question for churches in other cultures is not whether we should have a political system and social organisation based on the scientific world-view or on a faith framework. The question is "which faith framework?"[842]

Thus the charge is not that Newbigin wants to return to a domineering Constantinianism where Christianity is forced on the population as the only religious option, but rather that when Newbigin seeks to influence national public life by appealing to scripture he assumes a privileged place for Christianity. Newbigin's most extensive explanation of his understanding of his "Gospel as Public Truth" project is presented in the small book "Truth to Tell"[843] which transcribes Newbigin's Osterhaven Lectures at Western Theological Seminary, Holland Michigan. It seems that the charge of Constantinianism comes because of a misunderstanding of Newbigin's use of the term "public truth." Newbigin describes a Constantinian approach to public truth that would mean "unanimously accepted opinion"[844] such that the state enforces religious dogma with political power. But he is also careful to articulate that the equal and opposite danger for the church in a post-Christendom setting is to relapse into the Pre-Christendom Roman

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[840] Forster(1991):35
[841] Stowe(1988):149
[842] Ariarajah(1983):74
[843] Newbigin(1991g)
[844] Newbigin(1988g):151

context with a "fundamental distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*"[845] where *religio* was the official state religion and *superstitio* a private belief generally tolerated by the Romans because it held no political implications for the believer. It is precisely this private/public dichotomy that Newbigin is seeking to counter in his concept of public truth. Newbigin does not ask that the Bible be given privileged position in public discourse, he simply asks that the church refuse to succumb to the bifurcation that modernity brought between public and private truth and the church therefore reject its role of provider of religious services.[846] Thus Newbigin's public truth programme is not seeking return to Christendom but instead it is an encouragement for the church to reject its banishment to the realm of privatistic individual spiritual guidance.

Although Newbigin has a sympathetic approach to the Christendom model, he is still highly critical of the results it had on the church, particularly on congregational self-understanding. If Newbigin's reading of Christendom's origins is correct and Bosch's wholly negative reading is an oversimplification, how can this loss of missional vision under Christendom be accounted for? O'Donnovan provides a helpful exploration of this dilemma. After stressing that the architects of Christendom "intended their institutions to reflect Christ's reign… as the church's one project is to witness to the kingdom of God… [Therefore] Christendom is a response to mission…"[847], he goes on to argue that it was therefore not an age in which "the missionary calling of the church was derailed", but that the church was "perpetually preoccupied with the challenge."[848] O'Donnovan admits that ambiguities in the mission of the church occurred when there was confusion between what he calls "Two-Kingdom-Christendom"[849] and "Two-Government-Christendom." Under the "Two-Kingdom" model the conversion of rulers

[845] Green(1990):38
[846] Roxburgh(1997):18-22
[847] O'Donnovan(1996):194-195
[848] O'Donnovan(1996):196
[849] O'Donnovan(1996):196

leaves the population's relationship with God untouched. But under the "Two-Government" model there was "a unified doctrine of society holding the twin peaks of authority together in a common social context."[850] As the Two-Government model gained favour the conversion of rulers became paramount and so mission and conquest became synonymous.

As the Christendom era progressed the church was not only institutionalised but became the institution of ultimate power.[851] Newbigin traces three stages of the church's relationship with political power. Firstly there was the "martyr church"[852] where the church existed as a minority body that challenged the reigning power structures. Secondly, following Constantine's conversion the church succumbed to the "temptation to use the secular power to enforce conformity to Christian teaching"[853] and thus became a majority church. Newbigin however locates the contemporary church in a third situation, a post-Christendom setting where it no longer enjoys epistemological or political superiority. The Constantinian settlement meant the identification of church with society; this was the period in which the church formed much of its self-understanding and Newbigin argues that this "was the period in which Christianity had practically ceased to be a missionary religion."[854] A missional self-understanding of the church as the elect called to God and sent out by him into the world was lost to the extent that, as Newbigin eloquently describes it:

> "the congregation was not a staging post for world mission but a gathering for the faithful… The ministry was not understood in terms of leadership in mission but in terms of guardianship of those already in the fold. Theology was not concerned so much to state the Gospel in the terms of non-Christian cultures, as with the mutual struggle of rival interpretations of the Gospel. Church history was taught not as the story of the missionary advance in successive encounter of

[850] O'Donnovan(1996):196
[851] Newbigin(1983a):30
[852] Newbigin(1989e):223
[853] Newbigin(1989e):223
[854] Newbigin(1966a):102

> the Gospel with different forms of human culture and society, but rather as the story of the doctrinal and other conflicts within the life of the church. "[855]

Through this continual reinforcement of a non-missionary approach to ministry, theology[856] and church history, the missional identity of the church was lost and the church took on more of a chaplaincy role to society. Thus although Newbigin has a more sympathetic view of the Constantinian settlement than many missiologists, he still recognises the debilitating effect it had on the church's missionary identity, particularly because the church succumbed to "the fatal temptation to use secular power to enforce conformity to Christian teaching."[857]

Although the excesses of the church's collusion with the power of the state was kerbed (according to Newbigin through the challenge of Islam and the schism between the Eastern and Western churches in the eleventh century),[858] the underlying assumption of an overlap in geographical and theological factors contributing to the church's understanding of its mission continued. The term "mission" was only "used in respect of work in traditional 'non-Christian' countries"[859]; whereas the term "evangelism" applied to the "reconversion work in the West."[860] So under the Christendom model mission in general and evangelism in particular lost their place in the congregational life. Stephen Neil described the church in England under the Christendom paradigm stating it could be extended to any country in Europe.

> "The vision of a typical English village of no more than 400 inhabitants where all are baptised Christians, compelled to live more or less Christian lives under the brooding eye of parson and squire… 'evangelisation' has hardly any meaning, since all are in some sense already Christian, and need no more than to be safeguarded against error in religion and viciousness in life."[861]

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[855] Newbigin(1966a):103
[856] Kirk(1997)
[857] Newbigin(1989e):223
[858] Newbigin(1986c):115
[859] Bosch(1995):29
[860] Bosch(1995):29
[861] cited in Bosch(1995):28

4.2d Church versus para-church

Newbigin argues that it was because of the church's loss of missional identity that the modern missionary movement arose through independent mission societies rather than through the body of the church itself. Historically it was only after Constantine that 'mission societies' came into being. Bosch argues that it was the Roman Catholic missionary orders that were the pre-cursors to the Protestant missionary societies. Whereas the Catholic missionary orders were inextricably linked with the official church structure, from the earliest exemplars in the likes of King Gustavus Vasa of Sweden who in 1559 was encouraging missionary work amongst the Laps, the Dutch East India Company opening a seminary in Leiden in 1662 for the sending of missionaries to Dutch colonies as civil servants, and John Eliot working amongst native Americans in Massachusetts in 1632. It is startling that in not one of the examples was it the official church that was driving mission.[862] The societies were normally driven by the initiative of enthusiastic individuals. The pattern changed in the eighteenth century with the Moravian missionary movement but the modern protestant missionary societies continued to have a separate existence from the church, being either inter-denominational or intra-denominational, the distinction still being made between the mission society and the official church. This separation of church from mission has persisted and Newbigin calls the church not merely to support mission, but "to be itself God's mission to the world."[863] Newbigin argues forcefully that "the New Testament knows of only one missionary society – the Church."[864]

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[862] Bosch(1987a):62
[863] Newbigin(1961b):110
[864] Newbigin(1960a):2

Newbigin's reflection on the missionary nature of the church did not develop in a vacuum, but was influenced by significant theological shifts occurring in ecumenical circles. In 1938 at the IMC Tambaram there was a rediscovery of the missional nature of the church; John Mott had said in his opening address that "it is the church which is to be at the centre of our thinking."[865] William Anderson argues that it was not until this conference that theologically the "church and mission found each other"[866] and afterwards it became "impossible to speak of 'missions' without speaking simultaneously of the church…'"[867] Thus from 1938 in Tambaram[868] until 1952 in Willingen an "ecclesiocentric" view of mission reigned. In Willingen under the influence of missiologists such as Paul Lehman and Hokendijk a desire to break out of the narrow confines of a church centred mission and a more secular approach to mission was adopted, with the belief that God was at work outside of the church, to the extent that the world set the agenda for mission. In the face of this theological shift Newbigin maintained a strong belief in the uniqueness of the church's calling in the world.

It is these convictions that encouraged Newbigin whilst chairman of the IMC, to pursue its integration with the WCC. The IMC was formed in 1921 as a direct result of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. It was made up of representatives of mission agencies and missionaries. The WCC on the other hand was formed in 1937[869] when leaders from churches and church bodies from across the globe agreed to form a council. The continued separate existence of these two organisations for Newbigin reinforced the notion that mission and the church were two separate entities. It was Newbigin's hope that the merger symbolised "the acceptance of the conception of the

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[865] Yates(1996):120
[866] Bosch(1983):37
[867] Bosch(1983):37
[868] Newbigin(1998):11
[869] Although the official formation of the WCC was delayed until after World War Two with the first council convening in Amsterdam in 1948.

missionary task"[870] as part of the very nature of the church itself. Newbigin's hopes would prove unfounded as he "faced an uphill struggle during his four years on the staff of the WCC."[871] Newbigin's desire was to provide a focus "of concern for evangelism among the multifarious and fruitful operations in which the WCC was involved all over the world"[872] but his evangelistic heart was met with incomprehension and his idea of an unfinished evangelistic task was generally rejected.

Although Newbigin argues that the local congregation is the primary locus for mission, he does see a place for voluntary groups and para-church organisations. Indeed during his time as Bishop of Madras Newbigin encouraged the forming of institutions such as the "Community Service Centre" in order that there could be "opportunities for Christians in various secular callings to learn how they can become more effective ministers of Christ in their daily work."[873]

4.2e Missional engagement versus Christendom's chaplain

Newbigin's emphasis on the missional church tackles head-on the church's self-conception as chaplain to Christendom. Tim Stafford described Newbigin as "God's Missionary to Us"[874] outlining how Newbigin's re-entry to western culture from long-term missionary service in India alerted him to the end of Christendom and persuaded him to apply a cross-cultural missionary "posture"[875] towards the West. Historically Newbigin was not the first missiologist to raise issues of the relationship between gospel and culture; J.H. Oldman's work on church, community and state and Kraemer's "The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World" are works from the 1930's on the whole issue of the (re)contextualization of the Christian message in the context of world

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[870] Bosch(1990):13
[871] Wainright(2000):174
[872] Newbigin(1985d):196
[873] Newbigin(1977):76
[874] Stafford(1996):24
[875] Hunsberger(1996b)

religions. Also in the 1970's the Bangkok conference of the WCC focussed on the relationship between gospel and culture. Newbigin notes that "the weakness here was that the cultures discussed were almost always non-Western cultures."[876] Newbigin's concern became the issue of the conversion of the West, which was raised in one of his most celebrated essays that can be read as a programmatic proposal of his post-India project:

> "If one looks at the world scene from a missionary point of view, surely the most striking fact is that, while in great areas of Asia and Africa the Church is growing, often growing very rapidly, in the lands which were once called Christendom it is in decline; and moreover wherever the culture of the West, under the name of "modernization", penetrates, it carries with it what Lippman called "the acids of modernity," dissolving the most enduring of religious beliefs including the beliefs of Christians. Surely there can be no more crucial question for the world mission of the church than the one I have posed. Can there be an effective missionary encounter with *this* culture—this so powerful, persuasive, and confident culture which (at least until very recently) simply regarded itself as "the coming world civilization." Can the West be converted?"[877]

This crucial question of the conversion of the West at this time came as a clarion call for many missiologists though Newbigin highlights the implications of the end of Christendom for mission forty years[878] before they receive widespread scholarly attention.[879] In Newbigin's estimation it is unfortunate that the church in general has either failed to recognize the end of Christendom or has maintained a futile and unhealthy "nostalgia for Christendom."[880] The end of Christendom provided an opportunity to evaluate the church's identity. It is possible to look at the church's role during the Christendom era as collusion with secular power, such that the church provided the legitimating ideological support for state power and it is this understanding of the church that has influenced the conception of the church of many non-Christian

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[876] Newbigin(1991):23
[877] Newbigin(1987):25
[878] Newbigin(1961b):9
[879] Smith(2003), Murray(2004) & (2005) and Hall(1997)
[880] Newbigin(1991g):68

people in the western world. This can be demonstrated with reference to the spirituality of un-churched people.

David Hay has published research on the spirituality of the unchurched and notes that the number of people who recognise there is a transcendent providence at work in their lives has increased by 90% in thirteen years. During the same time the number of people who said they had experienced help from a divine presence in times of distress has increased by 40% and a quarter of all people interviewed felt that they have been aware of an evil presence; a rise of over 100%. Hay believes that:

> "there has been no great change over the past few years in the frequency with which people encounter the spiritual dimension of their lives. What is probably changing is people's sense of the degree of social permission for this experience."[881]

This research challenges the secularisation thesis proposed by writers like Currie, Gilbert and Horseley who described secularisation in 1977 as "a diminished resort to supernatural means"[882] and a process that "is manifested in a diminution of both the quantity, and... the 'social significance', of religious thinking, practice and institutions."[883] The majority view in the sociological community seems at present to be that the secularisation thesis in its original form is false, for example Grace Davie calls into question "the assumption that secularisation is a necessary part of modernisation and that as the world modernised it would... be likely to be secular."[884] David Lyon also challenges this approach as deterministic based on a mechanistic and evolutionary framework that undermines the role of "active, reflexive humans."[885] Robin Gill argues that the secularisation thesis is flawed as it does not take into consideration firstly

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[881] Hay(2002):13
[882] Currie, Gilbert & Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers:99-100 cited in Gill(1993):5
[883] Gill(1993):5
[884] Davie(2000):1 Steve Bruce challenges this approach and advocates the secularisation paradigm – Bruce(2002)
[885] Lyon(1985):139

"recent fundamentalist resurgences within Christianity, Islam and other religious systems", secondly "the evidence about the continuing role of religion as a power with national conflicts – especially in the middle east, but even within parts of the United Kingdom", and thirdly "the evidence about the persistence of 'unofficial' or 'implicit' forms of religion within supposedly 'secular' Britain"[886]; this third point coheres well with Hay's research. Thus late-modernity does not seem to follow the standard secularisation thesis and so Gill argues that it is better to describe Britain as being "'religiously pluralist' not 'secularised.'"[887] As has been shown Newbigin's own understanding of late-modern cultures initially fully embraced the secularisation thesis, for example in "Honest Religion for Secular Man"[888], but his later works focussed more on religious pluralism and the increase of paganism. But as has been seen this remained undeveloped in Newbigin's work. Coupled with the pluralisation thesis another aspect of the explanation of the apparent paradox, that there is as much if not more interest and awareness of spiritual things, an increasing openness in the culture to express this and yet a marked decline in church attendance (particularly in western Europe)[889], is to see the trend in terms of the rejection of the church as an institution[890], which is something that Currie, Gilbert and Horseley foresaw. Hay's research amongst spiritually interested non-churchgoers showed that the response to the church was predictably negative. Hay cites one of his interviewees as representative of the general feeling towards the church; Mary

> "enumerated the defects of the church as (a) obsession with control (the church should be a servant), (b) living in the past (God is the God of the living, not the dead), (c) failure to be concerned with humanity as a whole - political commitment to the poor (collections for the poor of the world are mere tokenism!). Mary angrily pointed out that stopping going to church has nothing to do with losing faith, 'we need more religion now, not less'."[891]

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[886] Gill(1993):8
[887] Gill(1993):8
[888] Newbigin(1966a)
[889] Greeley(2004):73
[890] Davie summarises the findings of the European Value Survey (1999/2000) "in short many Europeans have ceased to connect with their religious institutions in any active sense." Davie(2002):8
[891] Hay(2002):834

Mary's criticisms offer support to Douglas John Hall's thesis that the church's unwillingness to reform its self-identity in light of the new post-Christendom situation is the major cause for its contemporary irrelevance.

> "Presumption upon the past power and glory of Christendom is perhaps the greatest deterrent to faith's real confession in our present historical context."[892]

Graham Cray comments that late-modernity "combines a spiritual hunger with a profound distrust of authoritative institutions, including religious ones."[893] Steve Bruce takes an alternative line arguing that the decline in church attendance actually shows not just a distrust of institutions but actually a weakening of religious beliefs in general, arguing "distrust of a certain institution… but if there was still a lot of demand for Christianity one would have thought that it would find some avenue of expression in the plethora of choices"[894], but this still does not answer Davie's contention that institutions in general are distrusted[895]. So the end of Christendom provides an opportunity for the church in general and local congregations in particular to re-evaluate their role in society and to begin to grasp again the idea of the church as an authentic dynamic missionary community movement, which, from sociological research, would be more attractive to a late-modern population. The Christendom model that saw the church and the dominant culture in Western society as synonymous has shaped the church's whole posture towards its culture. The church has developed an institutional self-understanding and has developed a commitment to "Christendom in its various institutional forms."[896] Hall argues that this is the "single most important cause of inertia and retardation"[897] with respect to the church's intentional and creative responses

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[892] Hall(1997):3
[893] Cray(1998):12
[894] Bruce(2002):71
[895] Davie(1994):19
[896] Hall(1999):67-79
[897] Hall(1999):43

to the new situation in which it finds itself. Hall argues that there must be a disengagement from the surrounding culture in order to re-engage missionally with cultures. Hall argues convincingly that rather than bemoaning the gradual disestablishment from the dominant culture[898], the church should actively seek to disestablish itself. This disengagement is not to deliberately render the church irrelevant but to facilitate a genuinely missionary engagement with the host cultures.

4.2f Missional community versus anxious community

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote an outline to a book whilst in Buchenwald prison that he never had the opportunity to complete due to his execution under the Nazi regime in 1945. Bonhoeffer described the coming age of humanity as aiming at:

> "the insuring of life against accident, ill-fortune. If elimination of danger is impossible, at least its minimization. Insurance (which although it thrives upon accidents, seeks to mitigate their effects) is a western phenomenon. The goal, to be independent of nature. Nature formerly conquered by spiritual means, with us by technical organisation of various kinds. Our immediate environment not nature, as formerly, but organisation. But this immunity produces a new crop of dangers, i.e. the very organisation."[899]

This prophetic piece of writing resonates with a theme that has been taken up in contemporary sociological discourse under the title of the "Risk Society."[900] According to Beck under the Enlightenmemt project the use of technology was an attempt to control the risks and hazards faced by humanity and to lay hold of human destiny rather than be at the mercy of wild fortune. What has become apparent is that the very structures, techniques and technology have themselves created further challenges. Indeed as Barry Harvey puts it,

> "Ironically, the effort to subdue or manage fate by means of a complex technical organisation now determines our fate through the very methods... that were designed and instituted to depose Fortuna from her throne."[901]

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[898] Hall(1999):43
[899] Bonhoeffer(1959b):164
[900] Beck(1997)
[901] Harvey(1999):100

Beck describes how the pillars of the modern industrial society have themselves come under the sceptical analysis of modernity such that reflexive-modernity has dissolved "class culture and consciousness, gender and family roles".[902] Society has been "*set free"* from these social forms, resulting in a "social surge of individualisation."[903] As a reaction to this, the social philosophy of communitarianism, which emphasised "societal formulations of the good,"[904] experienced resurgence in the 1980's in opposition to the highly individualistic politics of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. In the writings of Zygmunt Bauman communitarianism is contrasted with liberalism, where the good is formulated "privately by individualism."[905] Bauman argues that liberal politics emphasises the celebration of variety, as liberalism is "all about freedom of choice" [906] and the "resisting all homogenising pressures."[907] Bauman states that the "brittleness and transience of bonds may be an unavoidable price for individuals' right to pursue individual goals."[908] On the other hand communitarianism

> "is an all-too-expectable reaction to the accelerating 'liquefaction' of modern life, a reaction first and foremost to the one aspect of life perhaps felt most vexing and annoying among its numerous painful consequences – the deepening imbalance between individual freedom and security."[909]

Thus for Bauman the emphasis on community is due to the disorientation that many feel in late-modern times. He describes the community as "the promise of a safe haven, the dream destination for sailors lost in the turbulent sea of constant, unpredictable and confusing change."[910] Bauman's work draws on Beck's observation that the previous motivation for community was need whereas the contemporary drive for community is anxiety. The church has often echoed this cultural trend, aiming to provide a safe-haven

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[902] Beck(1997):87
[903] Beck(1997):87
[904] Etzioni(1999):144
[905] Etzioni(1999):144
[906] Bauman(1997):186
[907] Bauman(1997):186
[908] Bauman(2000):170
[909] Bauman(2000):170
[910] Bauman(2000):171

for believers in an increasingly hostile and secularised world. Congregations have often understood their *raison d'etre* as serving the needs of their members.[911] This corresponds to Bosch's critique of the institutionalisation of the church, as institutions tend to be conservative, passive and anxious[912]. Newbigin calls for a rediscovery of the church itself as a missionary movement. Bonhoeffer also saw the need for the church to recapture this dimension of its calling. Bonhoeffer called for a renewal in the 'spiritual vitality' in the church; he argues that the Confessing Church's "theology of revelation" (a possible precursor to the gospel and culture dialogue) allowed them to take a position over and against the world, but that:

> "the over-all achievement of the Confessing Church: championing ecclesiastical interests, but little personal faith in Jesus Christ. "Jesus" disappearing from sight. Sociologically, no effect on the masses—interest confined to the upper and lower middle classes. Incubus of traditional vocabulary, difficult to understand. The decisive factor: the Church on the defensive. Unwillingness to take risks in the service of humanity."[913]

Thus in a society obsessed with minimising risk, a courageous risk-taking church would be a prophetic witness. Historically the church has often been unwilling to take risks; as Hall argues, "much of our ecclesiology and church polity is informed by a process of corporate rationalization aimed at justifying the status quo."[914] Thus the church taking risks in the service of humanity is a powerful way to respond to the secularisation of the church and the risk society. Newbigin's missional church agenda is a radical departure from the cultural trend toward anxiety-based communities that has infected the church. Newbigin will not allow the church to see herself as simply a place of safety to escape the woes of modern life, or some kind of spiritual fix, but instead he calls the church to be a place for engagement and joint servant action for the benefit of the wider

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[911] Mostly understood as providing for the emotional and psychological need for safety of its members see Roxburgh(1997):19-20

[912] Bosch(1990):51 citing Niehburh, H.R.(1959) *The Kingdom of God in America.* New York:Harper and Brothers :11f

[913] Bonhoeffer(1959b):164

[914] Hall(1999):7

community. The church exists not for the comfort of its members but for the universal blessing of humanity: as Bonhoeffer wrote: "The church is her true self only when she exists for humanity."[915]

4.2g Conclusions

Newbigin's doctrine of revelation provides the theological key for understanding the missionary nature of the church as Newbigin's ecclesiology is controlled by his understanding of God's overall purposes of revelation and reconciliation. God reveals himself through an elect people in order that divine-human and inter-human reconciliation can occur simultaneously. Thus Newbigin's doctrine of election is again shown to be subservient to his doctrine of revelation.

During the Christendom period in general the church acted as an institutional body legitimising imperial power and this effectively, though unintentionally, brought about the loss of the church's intrinsically missionary identity and thus the distinction between church, culture and gospel were obscured. This loss of the church's missionary vision led to mission being understood as something distinct from the church as the modern development of the missionary society demonstrates. The end of Christendom, often a cause of anxiety in ecclesial circles as the church loses its privileged position in society, needs to be grasped as an opportunity for the church to re-evaluate its relationship with its host culture and the gospel. The popular perception of the church in late-modernity is negative due to the lingering effects of the Christendom model of the church where the church is seen as a power-hungry conservative institution. A re-evaluation of the church's role and message assisted by international Christian dialogue is vital if the church is to be able to take up its evangelistic role of being a faithful embodiment and verbal witness of the truth of the gospel.

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[915] Bonhoeffer(1959b):166

In late-modern contexts community is often seen primarily as a provider of safety. Newbigin's emphasis on missional community offers a counter-cultural approach that provides the church with an opportunity to demonstrate its uniqueness as God's community called out of the world to serve the world by witnessing to Christ's reign in word and deed.

This missional conception of the congregation is intrinsically linked with the two other emphases in Newbigin's ecclesiology, namely unity and eschatology. The missional congregation must be a united community if it is to have any credibility mediating the revelation of the gospel of reconciliation. The missional congregation is empowered by an eschatological vision and its mission is to reveal through proclamation and demonstration the present and yet coming reign of God. Central to Newbigin's missiological ecclesiology is the fact that it is

> "by an action of the sovereign Spirit of God that the church is launched on its mission. It remains the mission of the Spirit."[916]

Thus the map of Newbigin's ecclesiology provided at the beginning of the chapter rings true as there is important overlap between unity, eschatology, pneumatology and missional identity in Newbigin's doctrine of the church. This will be expanded further as Newbigin's approach to church unity is now explored.

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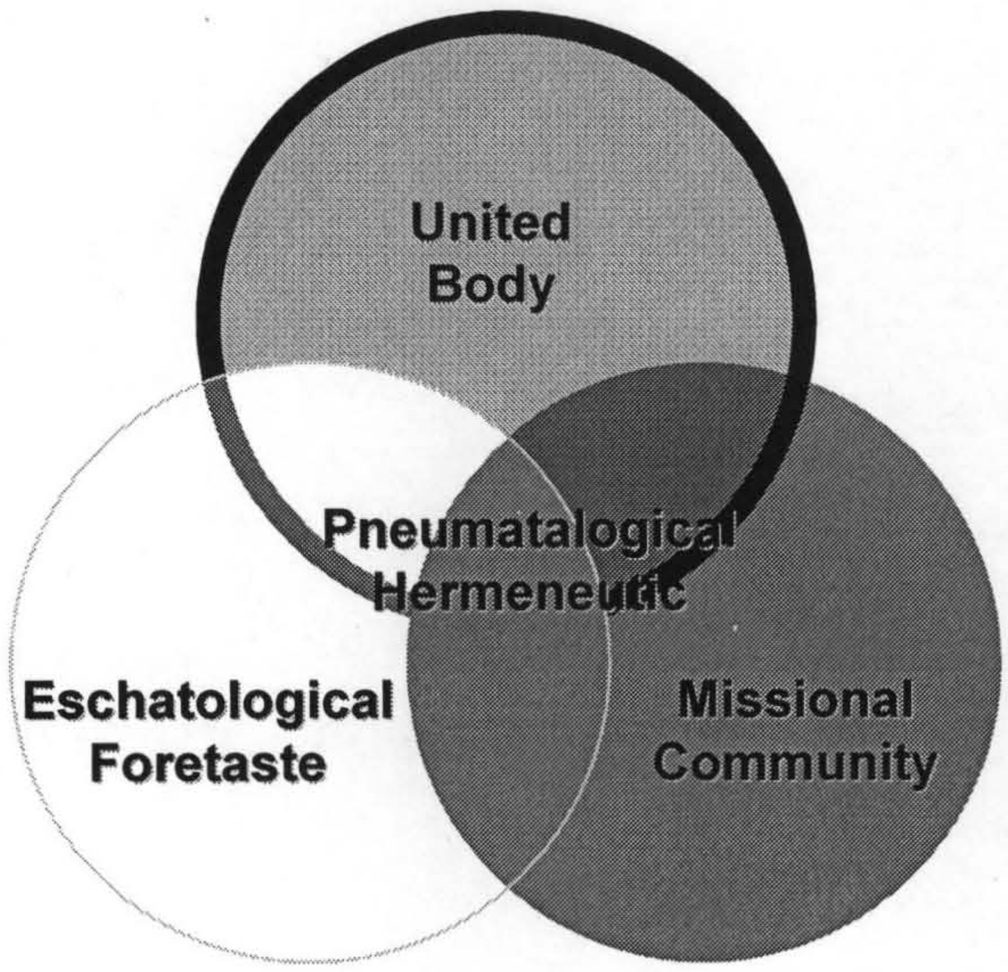
[916] Newbigin(1995h):58

4.3 Emphasis Two: The congregation as united body



4.3a Newbigin's evangelistic ecumenism

Unity is an essential facet of Newbigin's ecclesiology as Goheen observes: "there is no other subject that he addressed more often in his writings."[917] Newbigin's career in ministry testifies to his commitment to the unity of the church as he served tirelessly and often thanklessly in ecumenical contexts.[918] What is not widely acknowledged is the centrality of evangelism in motivating Newbigin's ecumenism; this is directly linked to Newbigin's doctrine of revelation and his understanding of the identity and purpose of the church.

"The Reunion of the Church" is Newbigin's theological defence of the 1947 Church of South India (CSI) unification scheme in which Newbigin played a strategic role. The CSI was the joining of the South India United Church (made up of reformed Presbyterian and Congregational Churches), the South Indian Methodist Church and Anglicans from the Church Missionary Society to form one visible institutional church.

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[917] Goheen(2001):200

[918] Twelve years as Bishop of Madurai with the CSI, six years as an administrator with IMC and WCC and nine years as Bishop of Madras with the CSI.

In this exploration of Newbigin's ecclesiology, it is not necessary to examine in detail the whole of the book's argument, but "The Reunion of the Church" provides an access point for examining the motivation of Newbigin's ecumenism.

> "It is not possible to account for the contentment with divisions of the church except upon the basis of a loss of the conviction that the church exists to bring all men to Christ."[919]

Thus, from early on in Newbigin's career his ecumenism is evangelistically motivated.[920] In "The Reunion of the Church" Newbigin argues that for many people the openness to ecumenism of the "churches of what used to be called the 'mission field'"[921] is due to their social location as minority groupings facing the opposition of "an ancient and powerful religious system they… feel themselves instinctively drawn together and… emphasise what they hold in common rather than what divides them."[922]

Newbigin argues that this is a false reading of the motivation behind the CSI and undertakes a rigorous theological defence of the project. Newbigin argues vehemently that the motivation for the CSI was a missionary vision rather than a sense of retreat and defeatism due to the sociological context. This again demonstrates Newbigin's tightly integrated ecclesiology as for him unity and mission are intrinsically linked. Indeed, two of the important and interrelated culprits Newbigin blames for the fragmentation of the church are firstly the failure of the church to live up to its missional calling and secondly the fact that when the missionary societies sought to remedy the situation, they brought to the mission field "an inadequate doctrine of the church"[923] and therefore lost sight of the fact that "it is the church which is the mission because it has the commission

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[919] Newbigin(1960a):3
[920] Newbigin(1953):17
[921] Newbigin(1960a):9
[922] Newbigin(1960a):9
[923] Newbigin(1960a):10

to represent Christ to men."[924] For Newbigin the mission of the church intrinsically unites the church.

Newbigin illustrates this link between mission, evangelism and unity by citing the principle of mission comity. When the modern era of missions started, the Protestant churches in general tried to avoid overlap and so chose areas to work that would minimise competition. Newbigin argues that this approach had a marked effect "upon the churchmanship of those who were begotten and nurtured as Christians under it."[925] This meant that in any one place there was normally only one congregation and this congregation had the sole responsibility for the evangelisation of its locality. The non-Christians in the locality were thus presented with only one choice, "between Christ and no-Christ un-confused by conflicting interpretations of what to be "in Christ" means."[926] In this one-congregation-per-area model the church lives up to its calling of being "a visible and distinct community possessing the secret of reconciliation and offering this secret to men in its evangelism."[927] As has been shown a visibly distinct community bearing the message of reconciliation is an important facet of Newbigin's definition of the church and his doctrine of revelation. These two streams of Newbigin's theology coincide over the issue of the unity of the church as, unless the church presents a united front, it undermines its own message of reconciliation. Newbigin's ecumenism can be helpfully explored by investigating his understanding that division in the church contradicts three fundamental aspects of the gospel that the church is commissioned to proclaim, firstly that division contradicts Christ's sufficiency, secondly division contradicts the reconciliatory purpose of God and thirdly that division contradicts the eschatological destiny of redeemed humanity.

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[924] Newbigin(1960a):10
[925] Newbigin(1960a):12
[926] Newbigin(1960a):12
[927] Newbigin(1960a):12

Division: a denial of the sufficiency of Christ

For Newbigin the division of the church contradicts the sufficiency of Christ for salvation, a central tenet of the gospel. Newbigin's prayer with the re-publication of "The Reunion of the Church" was that it

> "may yet help towards the healing of these divisions by which we so grievously contradict our gospel, and hide from men the all-sufficiency of Christ's redemption."[928]

Division for Newbigin worked against God's revelatory purpose that through the church the sufficiency of Christ would be revealed. Newbigin understands the church to be "a union of sinful souls with the Holy God"[929] only made possible because of Christ's work on the cross and the sinner's appropriation of this through faith. Thus the church exists due to a dynamic faith relationship with God and "its unity, its continuity, and all its spiritual gifts are the fruits of that."[930] For Newbigin divisions are therefore a falling from grace, as they demonstrate reliance in something other than the justification of sinners achieved by the cross. Church divisions are a valuing of secondary issues that negate the basic gospel message.

Newbigin argues that once additional practices or beliefs are made the litmus test of orthodoxy, the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work is undercut and therefore the doctrine of justification by faith is obscured. The centrality of the atonement in Newbigin's thought is visible right from his conversion experience[931] and has an important role in his ecclesiology, such that Newbigin is particularly sensitive to any beliefs that would undermine the significance and sufficiency of the finished work of Christ. Newbigin is convinced that division is due to sinful behaviour and attitudes:

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[928] Newbigin(1960a):xxxvi
[929] Newbigin(1960a):100
[930] Newbigin(1960a):102
[931] Newbigin(1985d):249

> "Faction and division spring from carnality, from relying upon man rather than upon God. By these the gospel itself is obscured… "[932]

At one level this focus on justification by faith seems both simplistic and reductionist as Newbigin appears to be collapsing all the creedal statements of the historic church that sought to divide orthodox Christianity from heretical religion down to a single issue. At first sight Newbigin appears to simplistically select justification by faith as the sole litmus test of orthodoxy. This selection seems arbitrary, as there are other doctrines that define Christianity orthodoxy. For example it could easily be argued that justification by faith is only understood as a central tenet of Christianity as part of a wider creedal matrix – where justification is only made possibly because of the atonement, which in turn is only consistent with the dual nature of Christ that in turn only makes sense within a Trinitarian framework. Thus on its own Newbigin's argument that divisions are a valuing of secondary issues that negate the basic gospel message is unfair, as many of the historic divisions within the church, one could argue, were motivated by a desire to preserve the integrity of the gospel. Newbigin's wider ecclesiology and his practice militate against this reading as his comments here must be understood within the context of his wider work as Newbigin defended the CSI's adoption of a doctrinal statement that included much more than an assertion of the doctrine of justification by faith. Within this limited context Newbigin's criticism of church disunity has much to commend it as many of the divisions that exist between churches that supposedly hold to justification by faith in Christ can be exposed as diluting the gospel by elevating secondary issues to the status of gospel essentials. For Newbigin unity is vital for the church in its task of evangelism as the congregation is supposed to be a revelatory sign of the reconciling and justifying work of Christ.

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[932] Newbigin(1960a):100 also (1961b):82

Division: a denial of the message of reconciliation

Another major facet of Newbigin's understanding of the gospel is the centrality of God's reconciling purposes in human history. This reconciliation is not simply between an individual and God but is fundamentally a corporate experience. The congregation as a unified community is vital to Newbigin's doctrine of revelation as for him there is an intrinsic link between the content of the gospel and the context in which it is heard and received.

> "A salvation whose very essence is that it is corporate and cosmic, the restoration of the broken harmony between all men and between man and God and man and nature, must be communicated… in and by the actual development of a community which embodies - if only in foretaste -the restored harmony of which it speaks."[933]

Thus Newbigin's ecumenism flows from a desire to present the gospel through a medium that befits the message, namely a unified congregation that embodies the message of reconciliation.

> "[B]y the Church's visible unity… the gospel is proclaimed. The marvellous unity of Jew and Gentile in visible fellowship is the means by which the age long purpose of God to sum up all things in Christ is being revealed (Eph. iii.1-13)."[934]

Newbigin's reference to Ephesians is significant as here God's eternal purpose is explained in terms of the creation of a new humanity through Christ that transcends the barriers erected by humanity between people. In the Ephesian epistle, the extent of the mission of Christ is expounded, "the span of this 'unity' this 'summing up' is across the chasm of heaven and earth it is cosmic in scope."[935] The cosmic extent of the unity achieved in Christ is linked with ecclesiology such that

> "the building up of this one community… from diverse and formerly alienated people is a sign of the ultimate goal of God's plan. This understanding of the

[933] Newbigin(1953):141
[934] Newbigin(1960a):100
[935] Senior & Stuhlmueller(1983):201

> nature of the church further defines its missionary responsibility: its own experience of reconciliation is to be communicated to the world."[936]

Lindbeck writes that in Ephesians the inclusion of the Gentiles is represented "as the most wonderful aspect of the work of Christ, the beginnings of the new humanity, the third race… Thus has begun the gathering of all humankind into God's people."[937] In short the reconciled community is part of the gospel message itself; the good news of reconciliation is not just proclaimed by the congregation, the congregation *is* part of the gospel.

Division: a denial of the church's eschatological destiny

For Newbigin disunity contradicts the gospel in a third way that is closely linked to the second, which is the eschatological destiny of the universal church. God intends a unified humanity described in his revelation of the end of history. As has been seen, a recurrent definition of the church is as:

> "the provisional incorporation of humankind into Jesus Christ"… All humankind is incorporated in Adam. We are all part of this natural human world. Jesus is the last Adam and the Church is the provisional incorporation of humankind into Christ. It is provisional in two senses… in the sense that not all humankind is so incorporated; and… in the sense that those who are so incorporated are not yet fully conformed to the image of Christ."[938]

As has been briefly explored in Newbigin's definition of the church this is a highly significant aspect of his ecclesiology and here it underpins Newbigin's evangelistically motivated ecumenism. Firstly this definition emphasises the unity of humanity in its incorporation into the fallen humanity of Adam. Here Newbigin affirms the unity of humanity in its inclusion into Adam's fallen lineage, advocating the classical reformed doctrine of federal headship. But Newbigin goes on to argue that a subset of humanity can become provisionally incorporated into Christ. This provisionality seems to imply

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[936] Senior & Stuhlmueller(1983):204
[937] Lindbeck(2002):151
[938] Newbigin(1988b):30

that ultimately all of humanity will be brought into Christ. There are strong Barthian undertones to his definition and a hint of a nascent universalism in Newbigin's theology.[939] Even if this universalist reading of Newbigin is not followed, the essential point holds true; the church's unity in the world is a means of demonstrating the eschatological unity that God intends for redeemed humanity. Newbigin reiterates the vital link with mission that unity signifies:

> "At the centre of the whole missionary enterprise stands Christ's abiding promise: "if I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto myself", and its goal is to 'sum up all things in Christ'."[940]

Thus Newbigin's eschatology is ecumenically and missionally integrated. This is further evidence that for Newbigin the church must be understood in terms of unity, eschatology and mission. The church is missionary as it seeks so to proclaim the name of Christ that those that will acknowledge him are brought together in unity and readiness for Christ's appearance. Newbigin argues that the church must be "a credible sign of… eschatological unity."[941] Division in the church contradicts this eschatological function of the church and therefore nullifies its prophetic calling.

4.3b Ecumenism, evangelism and truth

Because Newbigin's ecumenism is driven by his evangelistic passion he is keen to avoid the temptation of a unity at the cost of faithfulness to the gospel.[942] Newbigin defends the CSI's use of creeds and confessions in order to guard against error and heresy although adding the warning that, "no creed has been framed that can guard the church in perpetuity from error. It is only the presence of him who is the truth, the Church's living Lord that can do that."[943] Newbigin is wary of the kind of ecumenism

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[939] Hunsberger(1998):225
[940] Newbigin(1953):17
[941] Newbigin(1988b):123
[942] Newbigin(1963):14 chapter entitled "The Limits of Ecumenicity- the question of truth."
[943] Newbigin(1960a):126

> "which supposes that the unity of humankind can be achieved by raising no question of ultimate truth, a false and deceptive ecumenism which advocates unity as an end in itself and denies the central claim of the gospel, that is Jesus, the crucified and risen Jesus, who is alone the centre around which alienated human beings can be drawn together in reconciled fellowship."[944]

Newbigin's mature thought on ecumenism and truth is expressed in an extended review article of "Ecumenism in Transition"[945] by Konrad Raiser, the then General Secretary of the WCC. Raiser himself describes Newbigin's forthright review as both fair and noble.[946] Newbigin's main point of contention with Raiser is that ecumenism is in danger of amnesia with regards to its missionary heritage and therefore likely to abdicate its evangelistic responsibility. Newbigin is particularly interested in the form of unity the ecumenical movement will take and sees three main possibilities. The first option is "a relationship of conviviality but not of mutual commitment."[947] Newbigin rejects this option arguing that it calls for no reformation and ignores important questions of truth. The second option is to understand "Christian doctrine as an integral whole, no part of which can be surrendered without corrupting the whole."[948] Newbigin also rejects this option, as again there is no room for dialogue and mutual correction and reformation. Newbigin advocates a third option that relies on his understanding of the church existing as a company of sinners justified by faith, "a company that lives only by the grace of God to sinners, a company that does not possess in any of its divided parts the fullness of what is "essential" but that God nevertheless in his mercy sustains."[949] Newbigin is committed to ecumenism because he believes it is a route to grasping more fully the truth of the gospel through inter-church dialogue leading to mutual correction and reformation.

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[944] Newbigin(1991g):64
[945] Raiser(1991)
[946] Raiser(1994):50
[947] Newbigin(1994h):4
[948] Newbigin(1994h):4
[949] Newbigin(1994h):4

For Newbigin it is by faith alone in Christ that protection from error is possible, indeed he argues,

> "the conviction that [God]... must have provided some safeguard against error other than that which is known in the act of faith itself rests upon the same human anxiety which is the basis of idolatry."[950]

Thus "the standards of faith, therefore, by which the Church's confession is to be judged is not the confession itself, but the revelation to which faith is her response",[951] that is the revelation made in Jesus Christ.[952] So Newbigin wants to guard the unification of the church from heresy but also from an idolatrous certainty in the truths of the gospel that do not rely on submitting our fallible understanding of scripture to

> "the supreme standard by which all things are to be judged, including the most venerable pronouncements of the church... the one place where God has revealed himself in the Word made Flesh."[953]

For Newbigin "the ecumenical movement will become fatally corrupted if it does not remain true to its missionary origins."[954] This perspective sheds light on Newbigin's advocacy of combining the IMC and the WCC in 1967. Looking back on this decision Newbigin laments over the failure of this integration to achieve his vision of a missionally unified church. He had hoped that that integration process would mean "an increasing infusion of evangelistic concern into the entire awareness and activity of the 'mainline' churches"[955] but instead in 1990 Newbigin found "it is now typical to find in the old 'mainline' churches an acute embarrassment about missions"[956] and he described how as the "last general secretary of the IMC and the first director of the WCC's Division on World Mission and Evangelism, I feel very much that I failed to

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[950] Newbigin(1960a):128
[951] Newbigin(1960a):130
[952] Newbigin(1960a):131
[953] Newbigin(1960a):147
[954] Newbigin(1953):18
[955] Newbigin(1990a):162
[956] Newbigin(1991j):192

fulfil all the hopes that we had when that integration took place."[957] This negative evaluation of the integration of which Newbigin sees himself as "first culprit"[958] is also present in his harsh criticism of Raiser's work.[959] It is perhaps this disillusionment with the ecumenical movement that helps to explain the fact that Newbigin who had masterminded both the CSI scheme and the IMC-WCC integration towards the end of his life was involved in setting up informal relational networks like the "Gospel and Our Culture Network" rather than devoting his energies to large scale ecumenical structural change.

4.3c Global unity

Newbigin also draws attention to the global dimension of Christian unity. Because of his awareness that there is no such thing as "a culturally uncontaminated gospel"[960] Newbigin is careful to note the importance of the internal dialogue that needs to take place in the global church. In the church's understanding of the gospel there is "need for the witness of Christians from other cultures to correct our cultural conditioned understanding."[961] This is a highly significant element to Newbigin's ecclesiological theology of evangelism as he argues that

> "the only way in which the gospel can challenge our culturally conditioned interpretations of it is through the witness of those who read the Bible with minds shaped by other cultures."[962]

In the 1960s Newbigin was also a voice in the ecumenical missionary community that argued for mission to be a priority for the whole church. For example he writes: "the Christian missionary enterprise … is the enterprise of the whole church of God in every land, directed towards the whole world in which it is put."[963] Thirty years later Anglican

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[957] Newbigin(1990a):162
[958] Newbigin(1991j):190
[959] See Bosch(1988a)
[960] Newbigin(1995h):149
[961] Newbigin(1995h):150
[962] Newbigin(1989e):196
[963] Newbigin(1960b):11

Bishop Michael Nazir Ali coined the phrase that "mission is to be from everywhere to everywhere."[964] For Newbigin this approach to world mission is essential to the very nature of the gospel, arguing:

> "The proper bearer of a universal gospel is a universal fellowship."[965]
>
> "our witness must in some recognisable sense be a joint witness, so that men may see not us but God, who has made us partners and brothers who were once strangers and foreigners to each other."[966]

Newbigin had in mind the inclusion of "the younger churches"; a term popularised in the 1928 Jerusalem IMC conference, which related to churches planted by missionaries that developed indigenous leadership particularly when European missionaries were withdrawn or interned in 1915.[967] Newbigin was in effect arguing for a change in relationship between European and North American missionaries and the indigenous churches, a change from paternalism to partnership in global mission. Thus Newbigin's global ecclesiology is directly linked with his doctrine of revelation that asserts a dialogical relationship between church, cultures and the gospel. However, Newbigin was still a man of his times and does not interact to any great degree with non-western thinkers. He rarely quotes from non-western theologians or philosophers.[968]

4.3d Congregation as united body versus church growth ecclesiology

Newbigin's emphasis on the unity of the church as a means of revealing the power of the gospel can be seen by contrasting his work with another evangelistically motivated ecclesiology: the Church Growth Movement. The chief exponent of Church Growth was Donald McGavran who hailed from two generations of missionaries to India and himself had a prestigious missionary career. Like Newbigin his missiology flows out of hands-on experience in mission in India. McGavran spent seventeen years in

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[964] Nazir-Ali(1990)
[965] Newbigin(1960c):3
[966] Newbigin(1960c):2
[967] See Eleanor Jackson's footnote in Newbigin(1960b):9
[968] The same criticism has been levelled at David Bosch's work see Sugden(1996)

evangelism, which saw tremendous numerical growth in the churches he founded. His first book to record his convictions about church growth was called "The Bridges of God."[969] C.Peter Wagner, McGavran's protégé, summarises the four central tenets of this book as being:

- The theological issue: evangelism is more than proclaiming the gospel but making disciples
- The ethical issue: unaccountable pragmatism was driving mission work that did not stop to ask "whether the kingdom of God was being advanced."[970]
- The procedural issue: the distinction between discipling and perfecting, "Discipling brings an individual or group to commitment in Christ. Perfecting is the lifelong process of spiritual and ethical development in the lives of believers." McGavran warned that too many missionaries were involved in perfecting ministry when seventy percent of the world was undiscipled.
- The missiological issue: "people movements" are multi-individual, mutually interdependent conversions where "members of families, extended families, clans, villages, and tribes would become Christians at the same time."[971]

It is this fourth point that leads to McGavran's most controversial Church Growth emphasis; the "Homogenous Unit Principle"(HUP). McGavran argues that

> "men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers."[972]

McGavran cites Michael Novak's work "The Rise of Unmeltable Ethnics"[973] as justification of the right of each ethnic group to remain itself and thus the validity of the barriers that each ethnic group builds around itself to preserve their identity. McGavran is not unaware of the teaching in Ephesians that the division between Jew and Gentile is healed; he states "Christian Jews and Gentiles become one new people of God, parts of the one body of Christ. But the one body is complex. Since both peoples continue to speak separate languages does not the oneness cover a vast and continuing diversity?"[974]

McGavran is keen to point out that

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[969] McGavran(1955)
[970] Wagner(1990):ix
[971] Wagner(1990):x
[972] McGavran(1980):223
[973] Novack (1972)
[974] McGavran(1980):224

> "Church planters who enable men to become Christians without crossing barriers are much more effective than those who place them in men's way. But biblical barriers must not be removed."[975]

McGavran calls the offence of the cross a biblical barrier and contends that there should be no compromise on the message of the gospel. He argues vehemently that to ask potential converts to cross "linguistic, racial, and class barriers"[976] is a non-biblical offence and takes the emphasis away from the gospel in evangelism. McGavran argues that the love that brings unity in the church is a fruit of the Spirit and should not be made into a barrier for the convert who wants to come to Christ. He then cites empirical evidence that

> "in most cities conglomerate churches are not growing rapidly by conversion. If congregations increase, they do so by transfer growth.... Brotherhood ought to attract these urbanites – but does not... In such cities it is good stewardship to remember that human beings like to become Christians without crossing linguistic, class or racial barriers."[977]

This is a fundamental assumption in McGavran's work that Newbigin tackles head-on. Newbigin notes the similarities between McGavran's work and that of Bruno Gutmann in Tanzania with the Chagga people emphasising that the "basic forms of tribe, neighbourhood, and age group are part of the God-given order of creation,"[978] found strong resonance with the 'blood and soil' ethos of National Socialism.[979]

Although in general Newbigin argues persuasively against the "Homogenous Unit Principle" of McGavran he still struggles with the tension between the need to preserve cultural distinctives and the need to evidence the new unity brought by Christ. Newbigin cites the example of Robert de Nobili, the seventeenth century Italian missionary to India, as a test case. De Nobili left the safe haven of the mission station and sought to

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[975] McGavran(1980):229
[976] McGavran(1980):230
[977] McGavran(1980):244
[978] Newbigin(1995h):142
[979] Bosch(1983):27

indigenise the gospel amongst Brahmins in Maduar South India. He mastered Sanscrit and Tamil, adopted Indian dress and "before long a considerable company of devout and learned Brahmins… were baptised."[980] With De Nobili's work came the beginnings of an Indian Christian Church. But Newbigin notes;

> "this had been accomplished at the cost of a segregation on the basis of caste. The established ecclesiastical authorities bitterly attacked him and in the end his experiment was condemned by Rome. They had reason on their side. Is not the church a congregation wherein all men are to be at home together? How can we tolerate caste distinctions in the church?"[981]

Newbigin notes the tension that is present in De Nobili's example and in the mission of Paul who,

> "devoted much of his immense spiritual resources in the early stages of his apostolate to fighting for the independence of the gentile churches over against the church in Judea… he would not have the mission to the gentiles interpreted as mere Judean church extension… But, this battle having been won, he gives the closing years of his ministry to the knitting up of bonds of mutual love and service between the gentile and the Jewish congregations."[982]

Newbigin argues that there are practical problems to be overcome, commenting on his own situation in multi-cultural Winson Green in Birmingham. He can see the need for different churches in the same geographical area that cater for different language groups, arguing that they may be "a necessary but provisional, measure for the sake of the fulfilment of Christ's mission."[983]

> "Separation there must be– for the sake of mission. The white middleclass suburban congregations of Birmingham, however devoted they might be cannot and could not function as sign, foretaste and instrument of God's purpose or blessing for the immigrants or for the shop-floor workers on the Leyland assembly lines. There have to be communities where these and others can hear and see in terms of their own culture the words and the signs of the gospel. The Church is not truly local if it does not take these different situations seriously, and if its forms do not provide for them. But separation cannot be the last word. The gospel is about God's purpose to unite *all* things in Christ. The cross is the place at which all of every kind and place are to be reconciled,

[980] Newbigin(1966a):110
[981] Newbigin(1966a):110
[982] Newbigin(1966a):111
[983] Newbigin(1977b):124

> forgiven, united; the place at which their different treasures are to be offered — not in competition but in mutual love and gratitude."[984]

So for Newbigin separation even for mission cannot be the last word. But has he given too much ground due to pragmatic considerations? Newbigin is caught in a tension between his theological convictions and the real life missionary situation of the local congregation. The tension is between the new unified humanity and the nature of an incarnational congregation that seeks to cross cultural boundaries effectively. This is a very real tension for congregations especially those in the increasingly multi-cultural contexts of late-modernity[985]. In a recent book Pete Ward argues against multi-cultural attempts at church, arguing that a lowest common denominator style of church worship always ensues that takes no specific culture seriously, what he describes as a "one size fits all"[986] approach to church life. As many societies are increasingly fragmenting into subcultures and there are ethnic ghettos still present in western cities[987], surely, following the incarnational model of Christ, the emphasis is on the church crossing cultural boundaries and planting culture-specific churches. This tension in Newbigin's thought may well have been resolved if he had paid more attention to the concept of the church as icon of the Trinity and more closely examined the context of the early church; these two aspects will now be explored.

4.3e Congregation as icon of the Trinity

Geoffrey Wainright observes that the turning point for Newbigin's self-consciously Trinitarian approach to missiology took place with the publication of his book "The Household of God", a book based on the Kerr Lectures delivered at Trinity College, Glasgow in November 1952.[988] Wainright states that "the reality of the Trinity, never of

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[984] Newbigin(1977b):123-4
[985] Jongeneel(2002)
[986] Ward,P.(2002b):19
[987] Johnston, R. Forrest, J. & Poulsen, M. (2002)
[988] Newbigin(1953):ix

course absent from his earlier writings, gained a new prominence that was thereafter maintained in his thought."[989] Newbigin himself traces the development of his Trinitarian missiology arguing that his attempt at a missionary ecclesiology "One Body, One World, One Gospel", published in 1958, was too "exclusively church-centred"[990]; a problem which he sought to rectify in "The Relevance of Trinititarian Doctrine for Today's Mission" in 1963, written as a manifesto for the division of World Mission and Evangelism. Newbigin's manifesto was not taken up by the division and he states that it was not until he wrote, "The Open Secret"[991] whilst lecturing in missiology at the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham that he had opportunity to develop his Trinitarian missiology. Hunsberger notes that Newbigin's application of a Trinitarian structure to missionary theology "never quite provides the consistent precision that would make its importance obvious."[992] Nevertheless the idea of the church as inclusion into the life of the Trinity was present in embryonic form in "The Reunion of the Church". For example Newbigin writes,

> "those who are in Christ are caught up into that perpetual self-offering of the Son to the Father in the Spirit which is the life of the Godhead."[993]

The theme is further developed when Newbigin argues that the unity of the church is a unity in diversity that is modelled on the Trinity itself. Newbigin approvingly quotes Cyrille Argenti who argues that

> "True conciliarity is founded on the Trinitarian principle, that is to say, it seeks to make the universal Church an image of the divine Trinity."[994]

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[989] Wainwright(2000):98
[990] Newbigin(1995h):199
[991] Newbigin(1978c)
[992] Hunsberger(1998):241
[993] Newbigin(1960a):100
[994] Argenti, C. (1976) "Christian Unity" *The Ecumenical Review*. 28:34 cited in Newbigin(1977c):127

Although an awareness of some of the issues relating to the church as icon of the Trinity is apparent, these themes are not fully explored in Newbigin's work; indeed Miroslav Volf argues that

> "the thesis that ecclesial communion should correspond to Trinitarian communion enjoys the status of an almost self-evident proposition. Yet it is surprising that no one has carefully examined just where such correspondences are to be found."[995]

This lack of exposition of the nature of Trinitarian unity and the way in which the church models it may well have impoverished Newbigin's ecumenism, as resources for understanding the church's communal life as part of the revelation of God were left untapped. By considering the church "as icon of the Trinity"[996], a phrase borrowed from Volf, the dynamic unity of the Godhead could provide a helpful model for understanding the dynamic nature of ecclesial unity. The Trinity offers a model of unity in diversity. Colin Gunton argues that when the Cappadocian and Augustinian conceptions of Trinity are compared, "the latter is modalist in direction, if not actually modalist, in the sense that the three persons of the Trinity tend to be conceived as posterior to an underlying deitas of which they are, so to speak outcrops."[997] The Cappadocian conception emphasises what John Zizoulas has labelled "being as communion"[998], "the being of God is the persons in relation to each other."[999] Gunton notes that correspondingly Augustinian ecclesiology conceives of the being of the church as "in some sense anterior to the concrete historical relationships of the visible community."[1000] This leads to the Platonically influenced conception of the invisible and visible churches. For our discussion the idea of the spiritual unity of the church existing despite the disunity of the visible church is due to a similar Platonising influence. With the Cappadocian Trinitarian conception, if the church is to be the icon

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[995] Volf(1998):191 This conclusion was also shared by Gunton who argues "the conception of the God as triune community made no substantive contribution to the doctrine of the church." Gunton(1991):61
[996] Volf(1998)
[997] Gunton(1991):74
[998] Zizoulas(2000)
[999] Gunton(1991):74
[1000] Gunton(1991):75

of the Trinity there must be an actual visible unity between and among concrete congregations or there is no unity at all. If the church as icon of the Trinity is given a more prominent place in ecclesiology, the debate over the incarnational aspect of culturally relevant churches over and against the need to demonstrate the new humanity will tip towards demonstrating the unity of the new humanity.

The choice seems to be between the one (unified church) and the many (diverse cultures). David S. Cunningham writes, "God's Triunity is not merely a compromise between the one and the many. Rather it grasps both concepts simultaneously and defines them as requiring one another."[1001] In the life of a congregation the diverse cultural groups can maintain their integrity and yet there is a need for perichoretic relationships such that the cultures interpenetrate one another. In the church something new is happening, a new culture being constituted through the interaction of diverse cultural groups and the presence of the Holy Spirit. One possible metaphor is found in the birth of Jazz music.

In Congo Square in New Orleans circa 1819[1002] the city council established an official site for slave dances. At these dances there was a convergence of a number of different streams of music as European classical music, slave work songs, African rhythms and negro-spirituals combined to create a new form of music that later became known as Jazz. This new form was more than a lowest common denominator one-size-fits-all musical combination, it was more than the sum of its parts; it was the birth of a brand new form of music. The quest for relevance and connection with an individual culture is an important one. The contextualisation of forms of worship, church government and preaching is an important affirmation of the value of all cultures but it is not the whole

[1001] Cunningham(1998):271
[1002] Gioia (1997):4

story. The church is called to reveal a set of human relationships that do not fit anywhere as they are anachronistic as the church, as will be shown, is an eschatological entity. The church is a 'pilgrim people'; a group of 'resident aliens'[1003] and this calling supercedes that of cultural relevance. The drawing to Christ of all the nations, cultures and subcultures is an anticipation and therefore a revelation of the end to which God has called humanity, and the interaction of these cultures together with the Holy Spirit constitutes a new community and new cultural forms.

4.3f The model of the early church

The social context of the New Testament churches provides an opportunity to see how the theological tension between a contextually located church and an anachronistic eschatological community was resolved in practice. New Testament scholar Gerd Theissen has examined the Corinthian correspondence and argues against the tendency to assume, based on 1 Corinthians 1:26, that the church in Corinth in particular and Helenistic Christianity in general was solely composed of the proletariat. Theissen argues that this very verse assumes that some of the Corinthian Christians were from the upper echelons of society. "If Paul says there were not many in the Corinthian congregation who were wise, powerful and well born, then this much is certain: there were some."[1004] Theissen concludes:

> "Hellenistic primitive Christianity was neither a proletarian movement among the lower classes nor an affair of the upper classes… what is characteristic for its social structure is that it encompassed various strata."[1005]

Theissen argues that this would have marked the church out as a sociological oddity when compared with the other unofficial associations of the day. Theissen even goes as far to say that homogenous Christian groups would have been easier to implement but that the social diversity of the early church "became significant for the society as a

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[1003] Hauerwas & Willimon(1989)
[1004] Theissen(1982):72
[1005] Thiessen(1982):108

whole. It offered a new pattern for directing and shaping social relationships in contrast to that of Greco-Roman antiquity."[1006] Wayne Meeks' work in this area concurs with the findings of Theissen. Meeks states: "not only was there a mixture of social levels in each congregation; but also, in each individual or category that we are able to identify there is evidence of divergent rankings in the different dimensions of status."[1007] Theissen's work can be supplemented by Paul's subversion of the household codes[1008] that were common in antiquity. Paul radicalises these codes according to the new social reality the gospel calls into being in the church. These codes provide a window into the social context of the early church[1009] and demonstrate that the early church emphasised the expressing of the unity of the body of Christ over cultural distinctives. The household codes address ethical imperatives to the various constituencies within the worshipping congregations to which the epistles were addressed. Typically they address husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters. Paul's assumption in writing appears to be that members from each of these constituencies would be present when the letter was read out in the congregation. The most significant inclusion is slaves and masters. The cultural differences between a slave and a master cannot be underestimated and yet they were assumed to be present in the same congregation. There are few, if any, cultural barriers that come anywhere close to being as extreme as those that separated slaves and masters, yet the unity in Christ produced by the Spirit enabled these barriers to be overcome. Thus the apparent practice of the early church was to cross cultural barriers in order to reveal the unity Christ has accomplished and thus the power of the gospel is revealed in the visible unity of the church. In fact Tertulian in his second letter to Diognetus describes the church as "a third race"[1010] and

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[1006] Thiessen(1982):108
[1007] Meeks(1983):73
[1008] Ephesians 5:21-6:9 and Colossians 3:18-25
[1009] Fredrick W Norris argues that McGavran paid little attention to the biblical evidence for the social world of the New Testament church. See Norris(1983):272
[1010] Bosch(1991):48

this was used as an apologetic argument for the power of the gospel. Although Newbigin allows the homogenous unit principle to be a possible first step in evangelism, he vehemently argues against it being the last word; visible integration is vital to his ecclesiology.

Donald McGavran's Church Growth ecclesiology makes a sharp distinction between evangelising and "perfecting" (discipling), arguing that the important thing is that men are converted and then the discipling process is a chronologically secondary issue. John Howard Yoder argues that Paul does differentiate between issues of immaturity and imperfection from issues of salvation but that the unity in diversity in the congregation appears not to be an issue of perfecting but one that puts at stake the very gospel. Yoder argues that Paul's distinctive insight into the meaning of the death of Christ is the making of peace between Jew and Gentile. Thus Yoder concludes "the gospel itself does have a preferred social shape… it is communicated most integrally where the reconciliation of different kinds of people can be directly experienced by the very generation of those who first hear the message,"[1011] rather than waiting for the perfecting ministry that will deal with issues of race and ethnicity at a later date. Thus it would appear that a total rejection of the homogenous unit principle would cohere strongly with Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology as it gives another reason to understand the church as implicitly part of the gospel. Again Paul's Ephesian epistle would seem the strongest place to find exegetical support for this. John Muddiman claims that Epehsians 3:10 summarises the "main thrust"[1012] of Paul's thought. The Catholic commentator Rudolf Schnackenburg argues that this verse, and implicitly Ephesians as a whole, teaches that: "the church herself becomes the Mystery of

[1011] Yoder(1983):281
[1012] Muddiman(2001):161

Salvation."[1013] Indeed evangelical statesman John Stott goes further when he states, "the church is an integral part of the gospel."[1014] The factor that makes the church the mystery of salvation and part of the gospel itself is the fact that now in the church "the gentiles are co-heirs, co-members and co-participants of the promise in Christ through the Gospel."[1015] Thus as Peter O'Brien comments

> "the very existence of the church, this new multiracial community in which the Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body, is itself the manifestation of God's richly diverse wisdom… the context of Ephesians 3:10 strongly suggests that there should be a concrete and visible expression of this new relationship which Jewish and entitled believers have with their Lord Jesus. Local congregations… are that concrete visible expression."[1016]

It would not seem a large step to argue that in a divided world the church is called to be as much a prophetic sign across barriers of race, class and gender as it was in the first century. It is the multi-cultural nature of the church that is the proclamation to the principalities and powers of the multifaceted glory of God. Bosch puts it bluntly:

> "it may be true that "men like to become Christians without crossing barriers", but that is irrelevant. Membership in the body of Christ is not a question of likes or dislikes, but a question of corporation into a new humanity under the lordship of Christ whether a person likes it or not, the same act that reconciles one to God simultaneously introduces the person into a community where people find their identity in Jesus Christ rather than in their race, culture, social class, or sex.'[1017]

This position echoes Newbigin's argument that there should be continuity between the gospel message and the medium used to present it. The reconciling message must be revealed through a reconciled church, but also that submission to the lordship of Christ in the areas of racism and class snobbery may well be for some the first steps of repentance and conversion. It would seem somewhat deceptive to encourage people to follow Christ without demonstrating what Christ calls us to do.

[1013] Schnackenburg(1991):140
[1014] Stott(1989):129
[1015] Ephesians 3:6 translation Schnackenburg(1991):127
[1016] O'Brien(1999):27
[1017] Bosch(1983):35

4.3g Implications

Ulrich Beck argues that in the contemporary west traditional settlement patterns have been replaced by the modern metropolis and thus

> "people from a great variety of cultural backgrounds are mixed together and social relationships within the neighbourhood are much more loosely organised. Thus traditional forms of community beyond the family are beginning to disappear… the newly formed social relationships and social networks now have to be individually chosen."[1018]

Beck argues that this marks increased individualisation, as the self is now the centre of the community as relationships are "self-selected and self-created."[1019] Communities are thus self-selected groupings rather than sociological givens. Individuals create their own communities, and the ties an individual has with this community are loose and transient. Thus the traditional concept of community as "associations of individuals bound together by shared local environment, rather than by conscious interests or by links defined by a single characteristic such as class or ethnicity… but set by scale and accidents of geography rather than by choice"[1020] is being challenged. Bauman describes these self-selected communities as "neo tribes (or, more precisely postulated tribes)."[1021] These neo tribes provide "the solidity the choosers sorely miss"[1022], the safe haven from the changeable world. These tribes operate through the demonisation of others; Bauman quotes Jock Young,

> "'the desire to demonise others is based on the ontological uncertainties of those inside. An 'inclusive community' would be a contradiction in terms. Communal fraternity would be incomplete, perhaps unthinkable but certainly unviable, without that inborn fratricidal inclination."[1023]

Christopher Duraisingh argues that the impact of the centrepetal force of globalisation is that "the world's cultures are increasingly thrown open to each other. A process of

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[1018] Beck(1997):97
[1019] Beck(1997):97
[1020] Reilly(1999):144
[1021] Bauman(1997):195
[1022] Bauman(1997):196
[1023] Bauman(2000):172

deterritorialization leads to an undermining of nation states and democracies in a drive toward turning the globe into one large consumerist collective."[1024] But Duraisingh argues that there is an equal and opposite force at work; the centrifugal force "of narrow group identities, of blood and belonging, and of primordial ties of language, religion and race seem to fragment societies everywhere."[1025] The ubiquity of ethnic conflict adds empirical weight to this observation. Duraisingh argues that the centrepetal force of globalisation and the centrifugal force of ethnicity feed off each other leading to "intense social and cultural uncertainty."[1026]

This brief exploration of late-modern conceptions of community provides the necessary backdrop from which to explore some of the implications of Newbigin's articulation of the congregation as united body. In a consumer society that sees choice as a fundamental good it is not surprising that denominationalism continues to flourish. Denominations often thrive through the demonisation of others and it is not long before a tribalistic approach to church life is formed. Newbigin demonstrates how this approach to the church hinders evangelism. Newbigin calls the church to focus on unity as a theological and existential reality based on the gospel. Newbigin's ecclesiology argues that authentic unity will reveal the validity of the Christian gospel in a late-modern context. In opposition to the "brittle bonds" of community that Bauman describes, Newbigin calls for strong links of genuine Christian love because of the reconciling nature of the God who calls the church together. This means that the congregation becomes the place, perhaps the only place, where when things go wrong and disagreements occur, strong bonds of love hold the church together. The contradiction in terms that Jock Young described of an inclusive community is exactly what each congregagtion seeks to be as the church is called to be a "sociological

[1024] Duraisingh(2002):485
[1025] Duraisingh(2002):485
[1026] Duraisingh(2002):486

impossibility"[1027] that only makes sense through understanding the work of the Holy Spirit. The inclusive nature of the community that cuts across ethnic and nationalistic lines is a powerful antidote to the disintegration of society into tribal groupings.

Newbigin recognises the tension of preserving difference without compromising unity. Newbigin's hints at the role of the church to model itself on the unity of the Trinity, by modelling relationships in congregations on the unity in diversity present in the Trinity, showing there is a way of envisioning a unified church that respects individuality. In opposition to the consumer emphasis on choice, Newbigin argues for the necessity to be chosen by Christ for inclusion into his church. Thus it is an essential part of the congreations' calling to model in its corporate life the gospel it proclaims, as the congregation is part of the revelation of God's unifying purpose for humanity. The credibility of the gospel is compromised by a church that wilfully contradicts its message, and equally the intelligibility of the gospel is compromised unless the church verbally proclaims the basis of its unity.

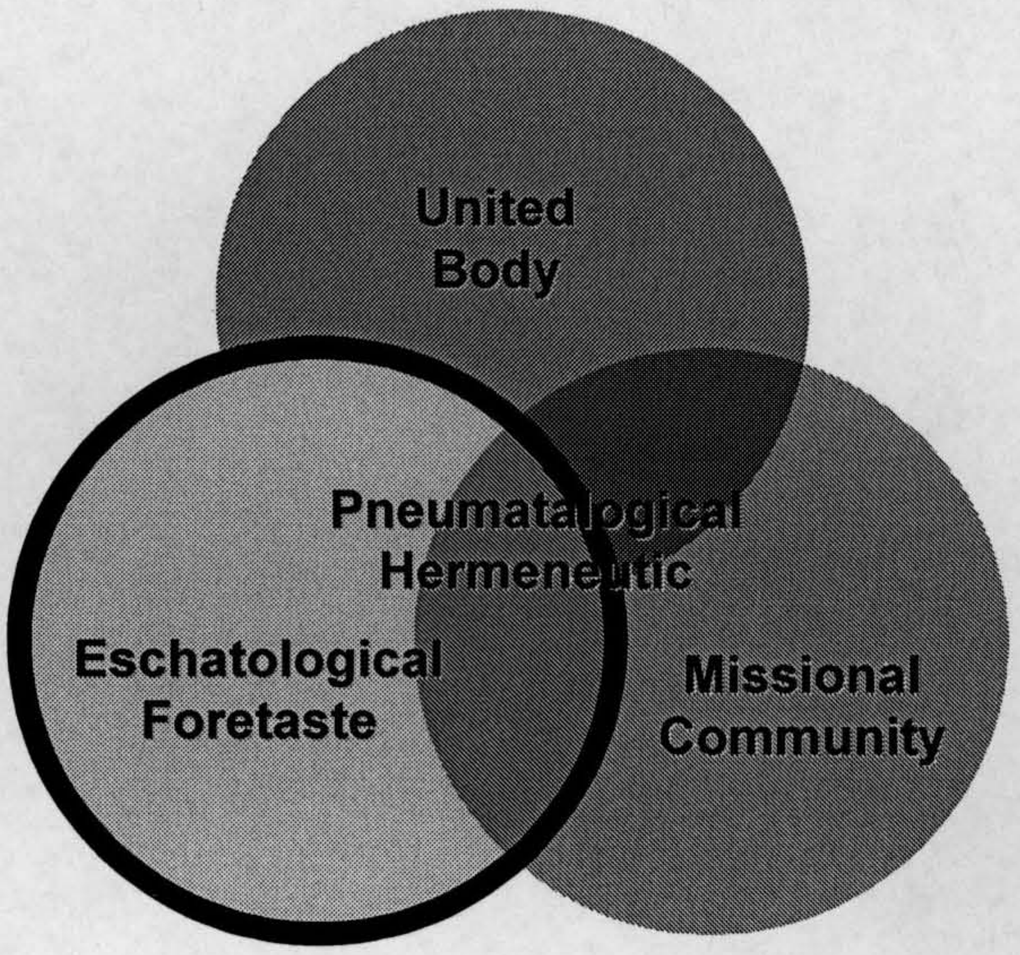
Western Christianity is increasingly post-denominational as there is a sense of ambivalence towards denominational boundaries. In some sense this would seem to be a very positive step as the increasingly porous nature of denominational borders should allow more theologically diverse congregations and therefore more chance of inter-church co-operation, but this often reveals a lack of clear understanding of the doctrinal issues at stake.

Newbigin's ecumenism is driven by his missionary convictions, but is also due to his eschatological appreciation of the destiny of the people of God and the privilege of the elect being the medium and indeed part of the message of the gospel of reconciliation. It

[1027] Hoekendijk(1967):245 cited in Bosch(1990):48

is clear that for Newbigin the unity of the church is essential to its identity as the reconciled and reconciling people of God. Thus the church will only function as a missionary community if it is a united body and as it functions as a united body it is an eschatological foretaste, a revelatory preview of the final fulfilment of Christ's reconciling work. Thus the congregation as a united community has evangelistic integrity as it provides a genuine model for life together thus providing credibility for its eschatological message. Importantly for Newbigin this unity is only achieved by the presence of the Spirit. Once again the exploration of one of the four themes of Newbigin's ecclesiology has led inexorably into the other themes of eschatology, mission and pneumatology.

4.4 Emphasis Three: The congregation as eschatological foretaste



For Newbigin eschatology and the doctrine of revelation are inextricably linked, as the gospel is an innately eschatological revelation. Equally the announcement of this gospel brings about the eschatological ingathering of the people of God, which is a revelatory preview of the final destinty of humanity. Indeed Newbigin states: "the church can be rightly understood only in an eschatological perspective."[1028] Before exploring the eschatological dimension of Newbigin's revelatory ecclesiology the relationship between late-modernity and eschatology will be briefly mapped out.

4.4a Late-modernity and eschatology

Late-modernity challenges the optimism of modernity. The idea of human progress became the over-riding ideology[1029] in the Western world, due to the influence of the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras. Bob Goudzwaard describes the work of the Marquis de Concordet as "the most important confession of Enlightenment faith in progress." De Concordet describes humanity obtaining "effective technical and scientific control over all natural processes… cutting off links with his past …. [and] rises to ever higher phases of humanity."[1030] De Concordet presents a form of

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[1028] Newbigin(1953):135
[1029] Goudzwaard(1979):xxiii
[1030] Goudzwaard(1979):40

utopianism as he prophesies, "that a new millennium awaits humankind, a perfect society in which "the human race freed from all its fetters, withdrawn from the empire of chance.""[1031] There were other utopian dreams of the future, not least Francis Bacon's New Atlantis,[1032] a perfect society peopled with scientists constantly improving life through new inventions. Goudzwaard concludes that under modernity "growth in prosperity and scientifically founded technological progress are the two indispensable allies on the way to a better future."[1033]Thus the Enlightenment project was highly optimistic of solving society's ills through science and technology, which would not only transform humanity's situation but also humanity itself.

Ironically Giddens argues that this faith in progress was made possible by the "*providential* outlook",[1034] a perspective that "emerged from a religious context which emphasised teleology and the achievement of God's grace… without these preceding [Christian] orientations, the Enlightenment would scarcely have been possible in the first place."[1035] The optimism of modernity is mirrored by the pessimism of late-modernity. Late-modern depictions of the future are dark and dystopian in marked contrast to the bright utopianism of modernity. Contemporary cinema provides ample examples of this. Comparing the dark landscapes of the iconic late-modern film "Blade Runner" [1036] with the pristine cleanliness of the "Star Trek"[1037] universe demonstrates firstly that late-modernity and modernity co-exist, that is there has not been a wholesale abandonment of modernity but there is a transition period in which the two overlap. Secondly modern and late-modern depictions of the future are equal and opposite; it is technological disintegration that provides the pessimism of Blade Runner and it is

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[1031] Engelsviken(1995):172
[1032] Bacon(1901)
[1033] Goudzwaard(1979):48
[1034] Giddens(1990):48
[1035] Giddens(1990):48
[1036] Denzin(1991)
[1037] Grenz (1994) illustrates the shift from the modernity to the latemodernity by comparing "Star Trek" with "Star Trek - The Next Generation."

technological superiority that provides the optimism in Star Trek. Giddens argues that late-modernity introduces new risk parameters largely or completely unknown to previous eras. These parameters include high-consequence risks, deriving from the globalised character of the social systems of modernity. The late-modern world

> "is apocalyptic, not because it is inevitably heading towards calamity, but because it introduces risks which previous generations had not had to face… so long as nuclear weapons remain… so long as science and technology continue to be involved with the creation of novel weaponry, the risk of massively destructive warfare will persist."[1038]

Giddens argues that this often produces a fatalistic view of the future; "living in the modern world is more like being aboard a careering juggernaut rather than being in a carefully controlled motor car."[1039] For Giddens the smooth drive to the future was modernity's promise of progress whereas in late-modernity, the future is the inevitable destruction that awaits a "runaway world",[1040] where technology is out of control. The risks of modern life, and the increasingly negative views of the future contribute to an increasing emphasis upon the immediate rather than the eschatological. Bauman uses the contrast between the savings book and the credit card to compare modern and late-modern approaches to the future:

> "Modernity extolled the delay of gratification… the post-modern world… preaches the delay of payment. If the savings book was the epitome of modern life, the credit card is the paradigm of the post-modern one."[1041]

Thus the present takes priority over the future as it is hoped that tomorrow never comes for it only brings disaster; ecological, political, financial or otherwise.

Baudrillard, arguably France's leading late-modern philosopher, argues "when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning."[1042] There is an

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[1038] Giddens(1991):4
[1039] Giddens(1990):53
[1040] Giddens(1990):150
[1041] Bauman(1995):5 cited in Cray(1998):6

emphasis on remembering the good old days and through historical revisionism this seems to be an effective deterrent to considering the future. Baudrillard also delineates how late-modernity is an age of "simulation and simulacra". The media is increasingly losing its ability to mediate reality as the public have become increasingly sceptical about its claims. David Lyon writes "image and reality become blurred, leading to general cultural destabilization. Symbols are overproduced, and the resulting glut generates doubt for the receivers of and participants in communication."[1043] Thus Baudrillard can write an article to the national French newspaper "Libération" claiming that the 1991 Gulf War did not really take place but was just a media event[1044].

In this cultural context there is often a sense of an all-pervading cynicism and scepticism as the promises made under modernity have proved false and leave great suspicion such that all attempts to narrate the past, present and future are held with incredulity. John Webster argues that late-modernity "characteristically rejects any idea that human existence in time constitutes an ordered whole, history is dispersed into a non-sequential, non-developmental, non-utopian, non-eschatological scatter of elements."[1045] Into this context, Newbigin's articulation of the congregation as an eschatological foretaste holds much promise, as late-moderns seem more than ever to be searching for authenticity and substance as promises are dismissed as rhetoric and verbal truth claims collapse into spin. Late-moderns seem to require more than verbal arguments for the truth of Christian faith and Newbigin's vision of the congregation as an eschatological foretaste provides the necessary theological justification for seeing the congregation itself as an apologetic[1046] that manifests the gospel in its communal life.

[1042] Baudrillard(1983):12
[1043] Lyon(2000):57
[1044] Baudrillard(2001)
[1045] Webster(2000):17
[1046] Hollinger(1995)

4.4b Newbigin's revelatory and ecclesial eschatology

In order to understand the significance of Newbigin's eschatology, the context in which his eschatology developed must be explored. Newbigin observed an increasingly secularised approach to mission at the IMC in Willingen in 1952 where Hans Hoekendijk and Paul Lehman sought to "swing missionary thinking away from the 'church-centred model' which had dominated… since Tamabaram and to speak more of God's work in the secular world, in the political, cultural and scientific movements of the time."[1047] Newbigin also highlights Hoekendijk's role at the 1960 World's Student Christian Federation Strasbourg Conference. The Dutch missiologist argued for the desacrilisation and the declericalising of the church arguing "the secular is the primary field of God's redemptive activity."[1048] Timothy Yates argues that these views greatly influenced missiological thinking of the time culminating in the Uppsala meeting of the WCC in 1968[1049] where the emphasis was not that God speaks to the world through the church, but rather that God speaks to the church through the world. Newbigin later reflects on this time in the WCC stating, "the whole vision is too much shaped by the ideology of the 1960's with its faith in the secular and in human power to solve problems… this model owed not a little to Marxist thought."[1050]

Newbigin expresses the eschatological dimension of his revelatory ecclesiology most succinctly in his booklet "Sign of the Kingdom"[1051] written in preparation for the 1980 Commission on Mission and World Evangelism which was entitled "Your Kingdom Come." Newbigin traces the theme of the Kingdom of God throughout the Bible but focuses on the fact that Jesus' preaching could be summarised in Mark's Gospel as a

[1047] Newbigin(1985d):138
[1048] Newbigin(1980d):13
[1049] Yates(1994):164
[1050] Newbigin(1994m):4-5
[1051] Newbigin(1980d)

preaching of the good news of the Kingdom.[1052] He then answers the common objection that while Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, the apostles preached Jesus by stating,

> "Jesus did preach the kingdom, but the only thing that makes his preaching news was that the kingdom was present in himself. Faithfulness to the mission and message of Jesus absolutely required that the early church should have Jesus as the centre of their Gospel"[1053]

This Christological focus is fundamental for Newbigin's understanding of the Kingdom of God and eschatology. He argues, most probably with the secular missiologists in mind, that

> "it is equally necessary to recognise that the language of the kingdom of God can easily degenerate into mere ideology if the name and the fact of Jesus is not kept right at the centre."[1054]

Newbigin's thought in this area can be best be explored using his description of the church as the "sign, first-fruit and instrument of God's purpose in Christ"[1055] which he first used in 1953 and which remained an important part of Newbigin's ecclesial eschatology.

4.4c Church as foretaste of the Kingdom

Newbigin explores the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God by examining the apostles' question to Jesus prior to Luke's account of the ascension: "Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"[1056] Newbigin notes that the answer the apostles receive to this question about the kingdom of God is the promise of the Holy Spirit. Newbigin argues that this is because the Holy Spirit is

> "the foretaste, the first fruit, the *arrabon* of the kingdom of God...[he is] a real foretaste of the love and joy and peace which are the very substance of God's rule."[1057]

[1052] Mark1:14-16
[1053] This reading of scripture is supported by Origen who stated that "Jesus was the *autobasilea*, the kingdom in person." France(1990):233
[1054] Newbigin(1980d):33
[1055] It seems to have first been used in Newbigin(1953):145 and many times subsequently for example Newbigin(1977c):118;(1986c):117,124
[1056] Acts1:7
[1057] Newbigin(1980d):37

This description of the Holy Spirit as *arrabon*[1058] is a major theme in Newbigin's pneumatology. The gift of the Holy Spirit to the church is the means by which God provides a taster of the fullness of the reign of God. Thus for Newbigin, pneumatology and ecclesiology are inseparably linked, as he states,

> "the Church is the place where the Spirit is present as witness"[1059]

Hunsberger comments that this is Newbigin's major contribution to a wider ecclesiology.[1060] As has been shown this definition is used in the "Household of God" and is seen to be the distinctive that Pentecostal ecclesiology brings to supplement the Protestant and Catholic ecclesiological emphases on the confession of the gospel and the church's historic continuity respectively. The intertwining of the themes of ecclesiology, eschatology and pneumatology predate "Sign of the Kingdom." They find frequent expression in "The Household of God":

> "the gift of the spirit, itself the sign and foretaste of the age to come, is the means by which the church is enabled to lead this present age to its consummation"[1061]

Again this theme appears in "Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission"

> "all history is directed towards that end. All creation has this as its goal. The Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of the Son, is given as a foretaste of that consummation, as the witness to it and as the guide of the church on the road towards it."[1062]

Thus for Newbigin, the Spirit's role is to provide a tangible and credible foretaste of the eschatological destiny of humanity which, as we have seen, for Newbigin is the incorporation of humanity into Christ. The local congregation is therefore an eschatological foretaste of the unity that Christ will accomplish and as such functions as

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[1058] for example: Newbigin (1953):143; (1972b):54; Newbigin(1976b):10
[1059] Newbigin(1980d):38
[1060] Hunsberger(1998):51
[1061] Newbigin(1953):138
[1062] Newbigin(1963):83

a missional community. In his later writing Newbigin again reinforces his reliance on pneumatology, eschatology and ecclesiology, arguing that,

> "It is the presence of this new reality which… prompts the questions to which the preaching of the Gospel is the answer. The true missionary dialogue… is not initiated by the Church. In a secondary sense it is initiated by the outsider who is drawn to ask: What is the secret of this new reality, this life of praise, of justice, and of peace? In the primary sense, however it is initiated by the presence of the Spirit… [who] leads people to make this inquiry,"[1063]

Newbigin's eschatological ecclesiology is at its heart Trinitarian. The Kingdom of God is made manifest in the person of Christ and is given foretaste in the church by the presence of the Spirit.

4.4d Church as sign of the Kingdom

Newbigin's emphasis on the church as a sign of the kingdom makes an important distinction between the kingdom of God and the church. Newbigin's position that the church is related but distinct from the kingdom is an endorsement of the shift away from an ecclesiocentric view of mission that had reigned in missiology from the World Missionary Conference at Tambaram in 1938[1064] until the meeting of the WCC in 1968. Newbigin is not willing to endorse the catchphrase from Upsalla "the world sets the agenda" that blurred the difference between church and world which was inspired by the theology of Hans Hoekendijk.[1065] Newbigin argues that the church exists in the world as a sign, which "points to something that is real but not yet visible."[1066] Newbigin's transcendent view of the kingdom of God was undoubtedly in deliberate contradistinction to the prevailing secularism in mission. But Newbigin also argues against an "other worldly" approach to mission popular in pietism as well as the utopian optimism of the secularised social gospel by describing the mission of the church as:

[1063] Newbigin(1989e):134
[1064] Newbigin(1963):11
[1065] Yates(1996):197
[1066] Newbigin(1988b):40

> "pointing people to a reality which lies beyond history, beyond death. But we are erecting in this world, here and now, signs… that make it possible for people to believe that is the great reality and, therefore to join us in going that way."[1067]

In later writings Newbigin develops this with his concept of the gospel as public truth, going on to show the importance for the church to be involved in social issues at a global and a local level. It is in this aspect that he again criticises the Church Growth school, as having betrayed the kingdom of God by making the church the end rather than the means of mission. Newbigin states that:

> "every attempt to put church growth in the centre of attention; everything which makes it appear that we are essentially interested only in the growth and welfare of the church, and in the world only as contributing to this, is a betrayal of the kingdom and makes the church appear as a self-regarding society which stands between ordinary people and the vision of the kingdom."[1068]

Instead of being the end in itself the church is a sign for the coming kingdom of God and as such the church has a calling to reveal in its life and in its preaching the kingly reign of Christ over the totality of life. The calling of the church to influence public life has important evangelistic implications. As has been demonstrated Newbigin's epistemology is such that the usual separation of facts and values is unacceptable; the lordship of Christ does not affect only the preferences of individuals in their private lives but has public, national and even international scope. This was demonstrated by the early church's rejection of the religio/superstitio division. Michael Green in his analysis of evangelism in the early church, notes that

> "the Romans made a fundamental distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*. Religio meant the state religion… the formal link between men and the gods… It was not necessary that men should believe in the ancient gods, belief was a private matter. But they were expected to participate in the state cult."[1069]

The church could have enjoyed the tolerance of the Roman Empire if she had been willing to limit Christianity to a private religion, a *superstitio,* but equally it was not a

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[1067] Newbigin(1988b):40
[1068] Newbigin(1980d):42
[1069] Green(1990):38-39

religio "as it could not be described as binding particular nation to the gods. For Christianity was a faith which embraced men of all races and backgrounds."[1070] Instead the church called people in all places to embrace Christ as the Lord of the whole of life. This led to the fact that "within thirty years of the founding of the new faith, to join Christians meant to court martyrdom."[1071] The church's prophetic role communicates to any prospective converts the public and all-inclusive nature of the reign of God. Newbigin sees this role as having import not just for individual non-believers but also for "the powers." Whichever way the powers are to be understood, the church's eschatological role is to be an embodiment of the reign of God and to announce the reign of God to all people. This will bring it into direct conflict with systems of thought that are in opposition to the gospel.

> "We have to call all people to come this way with us, for we shall not know the full glory of Jesus until the day when every tongue shall confess him. And we do not know the fullness of what service of Jesus means until we have struggled to bring all the manifold works of learning and industry and politics and the arts into obedience to him."[1072]

Newbigin is emphatic that the church must be "a sign of the kingdom in the same sense in which Jesus was a sign of the kingdom"[1073]; this means being willing to emulate Christ in

> "steadfastly challenging the powers of evil in the life of the world by accepting total solidarity with those who are the victims of those powers; insofar as, by accepting in its own life the weight of the world's wrong it exposes and judges the wrongdoers in the act of saving both them and their victims."[1074]

Thus Newbigin sees the eschatological role of the church as revealing now in its life and actions the coming reign of God. This means the church will not be content with

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[1070] Green(1990):40
[1071] Green(1990):42
[1072] Newbigin(1991g):35
[1073] Newbigin(1980d):45
[1074] Newbigin(1980d):51 Later Newbigin reacts against the over-use of the word solidarity as it "suggests too naïve an acceptance of all human struggle as being directed toward the will of God." Newbigin(1994m):4 preferring instead to emphasise love, as the notion encourages the correct distinction between church and world, lover and beloved.

privatised religion but must be involved in public life. Evangelism by the local congregation is to be understood eschatologically, because

> "the whole existence of this congregation must be such as to mediate to the people of that place the call of Christ which speaks to them as they are but calls them from what they are in order that – in Christ – they may become God's new creation."[1075]

This commitment to the significance of eschatology for evangelism is shared by William Abraham in his seminal work on the theology of evangelism, "The Logic of Evangelism"[1076], where he writes:

> "Evangelism should begin from a deep sense of the reality of the reign of God within the Christian community…if God is not allowed to be Lord in the church, then it is unlikely that the church will be very effective in introducing people to the rule of God… So one of the primary and irreplaceable ingredients in evangelism is the quality of worship in the Christian Community."[1077]

The local congregation acts as a visible embodiment of the age to come, but its message also calls people towards the new order that God will bring about. Newbigin writes that "the church is only properly itself when it calls people to conversion"[1078], which is to leave the old way of life and to submit to the coming reign of God in the new creation. Thus it is evident for Newbigin that the church can only be understood "in a perspective that is at once eschatological and missionary, the perspective of the end of the world and the ends of the earth."[1079]

4.4e Church as instrument of the Kingdom

Newbigin sees the church as the instrument of God's kingdom and therefore the church is sent "out into the secular world with whatever is relevant to the real needs of that secular world."[1080] So for Newbigin the church must be active in the world as "if there

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[1075] Newbigin(1977c):120
[1076] Abraham(1991)
[1077] Abraham(1991):167-168
[1078] Newbigin(1980d):68
[1079] Newbigin(1953):ix
[1080] Newbigin(1988b):39

is nothing happening, there is nothing to explain."[1081] It is the church's social action revealing a foretaste of the kingdom that requires the explanation of the eschatological gospel of the coming reign of God. "The words without the deeds lack authority… the deeds without the words are dumb."[1082] This is the unique role of the church, as according to Newbigin, God has other instruments for doing his will in the world, but it is only the church that has the function of explaining what is going on. Newbigin qualifies a purely functional or instrumental view of the church by stating "the church can never be so regarded for it is itself the place where we now enjoy fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit."[1083]

The three aspects of church as foretaste, sign and instrument are interrelated. The church functions as an eschatological foretaste through the presence of the Spirit who empowers the church to bear witness to the coming reign of God. The church can "only be an instrument of the kingdom if it was first of all the first fruits of the kingdom"[1084] thus it must embody in its corporate life what it seeks to bring to the world. The mediatorial role of the church in revealing the gospel to the nations for Newbigin is directly linked to the church's eschatological calling to incarnate the coming reign of God in the present.

4.4f Resources for evangelism in late-modern cultures:

Recovery of hope

Newbigin writing about evangelistic opportunities in the inner city focuses on the hope that the gospel brings in the hopelessness of many housing estates.

[1081] Newbigin(1988b):39
[1082] Newbigin(1988b):39
[1083] Newbigin(1966a):105
[1084] Goheen(2001):32

"in all our preaching... about the hope which the gospel makes possible, we have to keep steadily in view the fact that what the gospel offers is not just hope for the individual but hope for the world. Concretely I think this means that the congregation must be so deeply and intimately involved in the secular concerns of the neighbourhood that it becomes clear to everyone that no one and nothing is outside the range of God's love in Jesus. Christ's message, the original Gospel was about the coming of the kingdom of God, that is to say God's kingly rule over the whole of his creation and the whole of human kind. That is the only authentic Gospel."[1085]

Newbigin's approach emphasises communal hope; this challenges the individualistic nature of the progress offered by modernity and also the pessimistic fatalism of late-modernity. The congregation as eschatological foretaste challenges the rejection of meta-narratives that attempt to narrate past, present and future into a meaningful whole as without some conception of a future hope it is difficult to face the future. At a popular level the lack of hope in western culture is manifested by a desire for perpetual adolescence[1086], a preoccupation with nostalgia and the dystopian futures presented by filmmakers. The gospel provides a bold vision of the future with the coming of God's kingdom, and the local congregation is to provide tangible evidence of this reality. Thus Newbigin's eschatological emphasis coheres well with Moltman who argues, "Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionising and transforming"[1087].

Newbigin's picture of the anachronistic church refuses to capitulate to an "other-worldy" conception of eschatology; he argues for a partial but nevertheless present realisation of the future hope of the *Shalom* of God. Newbigin's understanding of salvation in terms of the four relationships that were explored in section 2.5a find their partial realisation in the life of the renewed church community. The restoration of relationships, both vertically between God and humanity and horizontally between

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[1085] Newbigin(1987b):3257
[1086] Schulze, Q.J.(1991) *Dancing in the Dark: youth popular culture and the electronic media.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans:38 cited in Stackhouse(2002):14
[1087] Moltman(1975):16

human persons, through the renewing and reconciling work of the Spirit functions as a visible demonstration of the gospel. The gospel is good news for the present and the future bringing hope to humanity.

Hoedemaker argues that there are two extreme positions in ecclesiological typologies. Firstly there is the church that defines its existence because of its "beginnings, by the apostolic tradition, by an original message that must be safeguarded."[1088] This typology would describe much mainline Protestant and Catholic ecclesiology. Newbigin's ecclesiology is less an ecclesiology of memory than it is an ecclesiology of hope, which corresponds to Hoedemaker's second typology. This is the church defined "by its emergence, as ecclesiologenesis, as *ad hoc* discovery… a church built on hope, on anticipation of reconciled diversity rather than on memory alone."[1089] This church, shaped by its future, echoes Newbigin's definition of the church as the provisional incorporation of humanity into Christ and this gives credibility to the hope revealed in the verbal proclamation of the good news of the coming kingdom.

Rhetoric and reality

Late-moderns have often been described as pragmatic[1090] and subjective, who care little for issues of truth and who are more concerned about feasibility, effectiveness and productive life strategies.[1091] But it is possible to see this as a reaction to the false promises of the Enlightenment optimism. There is a search for authenticity and Newbigin's eschatological emphasis demands for the church to provide tangible evidence of the final salvation promised in the gospel. Because Newbigin's ecclesiology is eschatological there is always the danger that he promises more than he is able to deliver; that is that his eschatology becomes over-realised. Newbigin's theology can

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[1088] Hoedemaker(1999):226
[1089] Hoedemaker(1999):226-7
[1090] see Grenz's reading of Rorty in Grenz(1996):151-159
[1091] Bedoin(1998):73

appear romantic and idealistic and the criticism applied to the work of Stanley Hauerwas appears equally applicable to Newbigin's ecclesiology. David Fergusson states:

> "the church advocated by Hauerwas nowhere exists. It is a fantasy community; the conception of which fails to reflect the ways in which the members of the church are also positioned within civil society. It does not correspond to any visible communities within the *oekumene*."[1092]

Robin Gill argues that there is hyperbole[1093] in Hauerwas and a demonising of secular culture. Gill argues that there is a similar sense of idealistic hyperbole in John Milbank's work particularly "Theology and Social Theory"[1094]. It would be easy to dismiss Gill's criticism as simply professional self-justification; the sociologist calls the theologian romantic and in return the theologian can accuse the sociologist of lacking theological vision. But an ecclesiology that does not interact with the present reality of the church's life will be deficient. Newbigin's eschatological ecclesiology is open to the same criticisms. But Newbigin's firsthand experience as a pastor of a struggling congregation in urban Birmingham must also be considered, as Newbigin was well aware of the struggles of day-to-day church life. In spite of the deficiencies of the church in his experience Newbigin seeks to inspire the church to a vision of what the church ought to be. Newbigin writes:

> "the church is not to be defined by what it is, but by the End to which it moves, the power of which now works in the Church, the power of the Holy Spirit who is the earnest of the inheritance still to be revealed."[1095]

This is also where the significance of Newbigin's deliberate choice of metaphors comes to the fore in describing the church as sign, instrument and foretaste: the emphasis is on incompleteness. Newbigin's eschatology has sufficient emphasis on the disparity of the

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[1092] Fergusson,D. (1998) *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press :66 cited in Gill(1999):20
[1093] Gill(1999):20
[1094] Milbank(1999)
[1095] Newbigin(1953):26

church as it is called to be, as it actually is and how it ultimately will be. In this thesis an attempt to walk the fine line between realism and prophetic challenge will be made. Indeed Gill's recent study on the relationship between ethics and churchgoing argues there are quantitative if not qualitative differences between the ethical lives of churchgoers and non-churchgoers. "The values, virtues, moral attitudes and behaviour of churchgoers are shared by many other people as well. The distinctiveness of churchgoers is real but relative."[1096] Evangelicals may want to question Gill's definition of churchgoers but my supposition from pastoral experience is that even if the definition were tightened to confessing Christians there would be a real but relative distinction between ethical standards and practice of those inside the church and those outside. Thus Newbigin's ecclesiology is realistic yet prophetic, and his pastoral experience adds weight to his prophetic call to the church as Newbigin's challenge is grounded in reality.

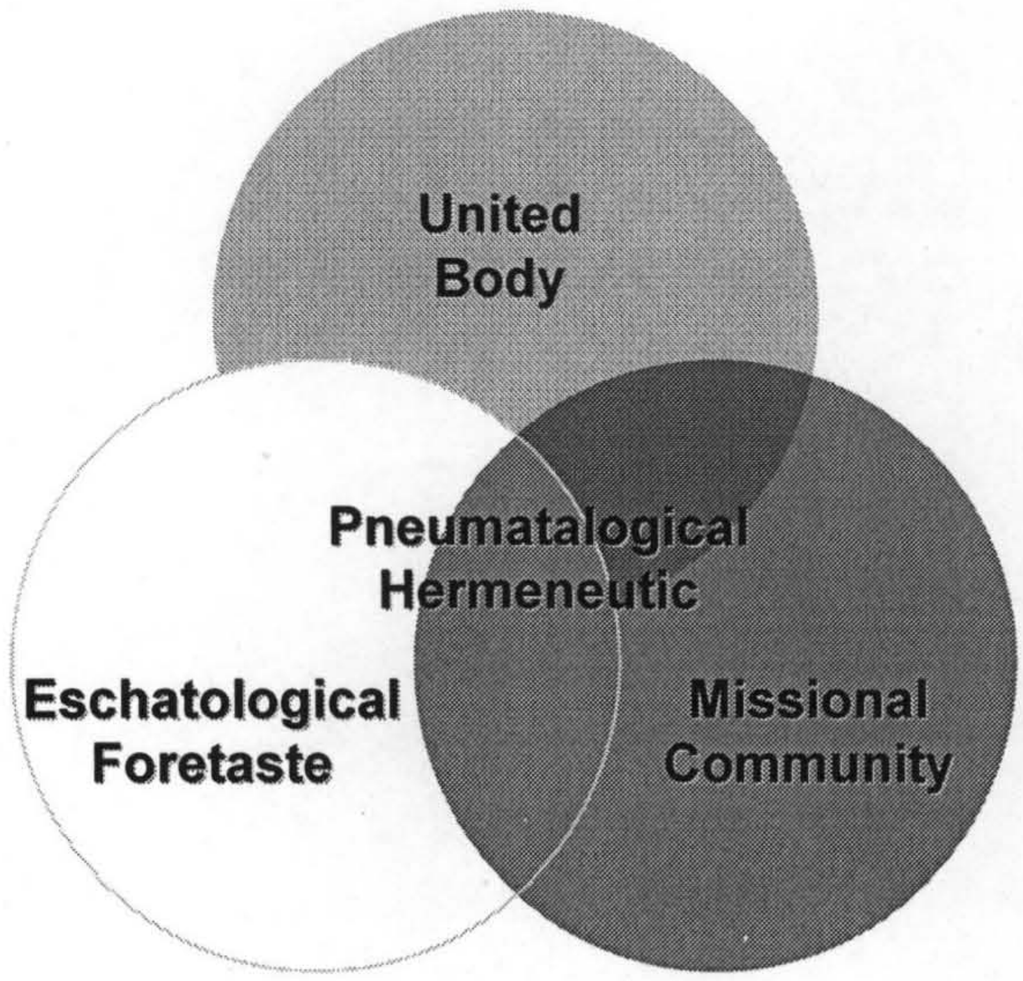
4.4g Summary

In Newbigin's thought the universal church has an eschatological calling to be the sign, the foretaste and the instrument of the kingdom of God. This element of Newbigin's thought was developed against the background of a rejection of both an ecclesiocentric and a secularised missiology. Newbigin successfully manages to respond to the limitations of church-centric mission and yet holds on to a transcendent understanding of God's call on the church to point beyond itself to the coming reign of God. Newbigin accomplishes this by describing the church as a foretaste in its life in the Spirit. Thus in Newbigin's doctrine of revelation the church as eschatological foretaste plays a significant role as the gospel is revealed through the mediation of the church. Thus the local congregation is to function in its context as an anachronism, demonstrating a

[1096] Gill(1999):197

partial realisation of the coming reign of God both in its corporate life and in its mission. It is to the convergence of the themes of the church as revelatory, ecumenical, missional and eschatological that this thesis now turns as the pneumatological and hermeneutical aspects of the life of the congregation are explored.

4.5 Integration Point: The congregation as pneumatological hermeneutic of the gospel



There is sophistication in Newbigin's mature ecclesiology that provides powerful resources for a theology of evangelism in late-modern contexts. Newbigin's later work provides an integrating theme that decisively unites his doctrine of revelation and his ecclesiological project. This final segment examines some of the most pertinent insights for a theology of evangelism, as there is an important tying up of the threads not just of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation but of his entire missiological project. There is timeliness to the coming of age of Newbigin's ecclesiology as it complements developments in philosophy and sociology.

A novel threefold demarcation has been applied to Newbigin's ecclesiology and it is now time to show how these three dimensions integrate. There appear to be two possible gathering points in Newbigin's ecclesiology. Firstly, it is apparent that the theme of the congregation as pneumatological community unites Newbigin's ecclesiology as it is the Spirit that empowers the congregation as a missional community, that constitutes the congregation as a united body and that inaugurates the last days in which the church functions as a sign of the Kingdom. However it could

equally be argued that the church as an alternative community acting as the hermeneutic of the gospel is also an integrating theme in Newbigin's ecclesiology. The church is missionary as it is by very nature the hermeneutic for the gospel, the divinely appointed location for God's self-revelation. Church unity can be seen as the hermeneutical key to understanding the gospel that speaks of the summing up of all things under the reign of Christ and eschatologically the church is the hermeneutic of the gospel as it provides the anachronistic foretaste of the salvation which the gospel promises.

What is the link between the emphasis on pneumatology in Newbigin's ecclesiology and the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel: are they twin foci or is it possible to integrate these two emphases into one? These considerations have enormous significance for the wider theme of this thesis of locating evangelism in the wider theological context of the doctrine of revelation and exploring the theological resources available for evangelism in late-modern contexts.

4.5a Church as pneumatological community

Newbigin is insistent on the centrality of pneumatology to ecclesiology. He argues:

> "There is no gainsaying the decisive place given in the New Testament doctrine of the church to this experienced reality of the Holy Spirit's presence in the household of God."[1097]

This echoes Newbigin's definition of the church as the locus of the witness of the Spirit. The importance of a pneumatological ecclesiology for Newbigin's thought can be seen in his appreciation of the work of the Anglican missionary theologian, Roland Allen. Newbigin describes how he was reluctantly compelled by Allen's writings to "take seriously the role of the Spirit."[1098] Newbigin writes: "I fought against his ideas- but it

[1097] Newbigin(1953):92
[1098] Newbigin(1962b):iii

was a losing battle."[1099] For Newbigin the heart of Allen's message was "the mission of the church is the work of the Spirit."[1100] Newbigin sees a great need for the re-discovery of Allen's insights in the West,

> "In England, certainly a strong dose of Roland Allen's missiology would have a wonderful effect in loosening up the stiff joints and muscles of the typical congregation, of whatever denomination, and would bring a liberating confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring his own witness into the life of the world."[1101]

Newbigin utilized insights from Allen in his mission work in India. Newbigin's adoption of Allen's theology can be seen in this excerpt from "A Faith for This One World," which could almost have been lifted straight from Allen's work "The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church."[1102]

> "When a group of men and women comes to ask for baptism, I have learned now that the first thing to do is to find out who are the men or women whose lives have been touched by the Holy Spirit in such a way as to lead them to this decision. When one patiently questions such a group I have always found that there is somebody, or perhaps two or three people, upon whom God has in some way laid his hand, lifting them out of their accustomed ways and driving them to seek this new path. I have come to believe that one ought to begin by regarding that person, or those persons, as the ones whom God has chosen for leadership in the new group. I do not believe that we do right if we elbow that person aside and put into the position of leadership a man of our own choosing who is the agent of our plans. The Holy Spirit, who has called this group into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, can also provide for it the ministries by which it will be nourished and sanctified in that fellowship."[1103]

For Newbigin it is as the place where the Spirit has his witness that the local congregation functions as a visible demonstration of the message of the kingdom, he writes "the only hermeneutic of the message of the kingdom is the presence of a community in which the foretaste of the kingdom, the Spirit is already present."[1104] Newbigin is emphatic in linking pneumatology, eschatology, ecclesiology, revelation

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[1099] Newbigin(1995l):xiii
[1100] Newbigin(1962b):iii
[1101] Newbigin(1995l):xiv-xv
[1102] Allen(1971)
[1103] Newbigin(1961b):125
[1104] Newbigin(1980d):42

and evangelism. It is fundamental to Newbigin's ecclesiology that the church is the elect people of God and the prime distinctive of the elect is "the presence of God's Holy Spirit – opening men's hearts to believe the Gospel, knitting them in love into the fellowship of the body of Christ, giving them in foretaste the powers of the age to come, and sealing them as Christ's until his coming again."[1105]

Thus for Newbigin it is only by maintaining a firm grasp of the New Testament's teaching about the Spirit that a right understanding of the relation between the church and the kingdom will be accomplished.[1106] Without sufficient emphasis on the Spirit, Newbigin argues that our mission will be Pelagian,

> "Mission is conceived as task, rather than a gift, an overspill, and an explosion of joy. Allen's insistence that mission is not one of the tasks of the church, but rather the very being of the church itself, is misunderstood if the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit is not constitutive of churchmanship."[1107]

The centrality of pneumatology to Newbigin's ecclesiology is clear. If the map this thesis has used of Newbigin's ecclesiology is correct then it is clear that there is significant overlap between key themes of Newbigin's ecclesiology and this overlap has a strongly pneumatological dimension. The church is missionary because of the presence of the Spirit empowering her for service. The church is united because it is the Spirit of reconciliation that unites believers with each other and with the Godhead. The church is eschatological because of the first fruits of the Spirit at work in her corporate life. Thus the Spirit of God reveals the gospel of Christ through the people of God.

But it is equally apparent that for Newbigin the conception of the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel is central. To state the conclusion at the beginning, I intend to demonstrate that it is precisely as the congregation is understood as a pneumatological

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[1105] Newbigin(1953):103
[1106] Newbigin(1980d):41
[1107] Newbigin(1995l):xiii

community that it functions as the hermeneutic of the gospel. This understanding can then be applied back into seeing the congregation as an eschatological, missional and united community. As each of these emphases in Newbigin's ecclesiology has been expounded they have been shown to overlap and influence each other so that it is difficult to understand them in isolation from one another. The congregation functions as an eschatological foretaste, an anachronistic community that embodies the alternative reality of the coming kingdom. Newbigin states, "it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the Church"[1108], as the *arrabon* of the kingdom of God. The life of this united eschatological community is one of the primary assets or hindrances to the credibility of its witness. Thus the pneumatological life of the congregation is the apologetic of the gospel and the role of the Holy Spirit is vital to the understanding of all three of these aspects. It is as the congregation functions as this community of the Spirit that it becomes a hermeneutic of the gospel. Newbigin writes:

> "the true witness to Christ in the world is the Holy Spirit himself… the church's mission is simply the continued ministry of that same divine spirit who was in Jesus."[1109]

Thus this thesis asserts that the twin gathering points in Newbigin's ecclesiology are the congregation as the pneumatological hermeneutic of the gospel. This is a vitally important tenet of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation and therefore his theology of evangelism.

4.5b Congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel

Newbigin's clearest exposition of the congregation as an "alternative community" is contained in a pivotal chapter of arguably his most significant book "Gospel in a

[1108] Newbigin(1953):90
[1109] Newbigin(1961b):86

Pluralist Society"[1110] entitled the "Congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel."[1111] It is significant that Newbigin has chosen the term congregation rather than church: the local congregation is a more concrete entity than the church universal. By refusing to argue that the church in general is the hermeneutic of the gospel Newbigin forces reflection and evaluation of actual congregational life in terms of its missionary purpose. In Newbigin's missiology the local congregation is the primary missionary entity. Newbigin argues that one must see the "local congregation as having a certain real primacy among the various units into which we may think of the church as being divided."[1112] For Newbigin evangelism must be seen as primarily the responsibility of the congregation. Writing in 1948 he states:

> "evangelism is the activity of the redeemed community seeking to share with all men the joy of redemption, and to welcome all men into the fellowship of those that share that joy. Much harm has been done by the wrong kind of individualism. The human element in evangelism must be the fellowship."[1113]

Newbigin's emphasis on the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel is the direct outworking of his approach to evangelism.

Within the context of the thesis expounded in "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society" the chapter on the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel has a pivotal place. Newbigin starts by exploring the nature of truth by appropriating Polanyi's approach to personal knowledge; he challenges the myth of objective scientific neutrality that was promulgated under modernity that led to a dichotomy between scientific truth and religious beliefs. Newbigin skilfully marshals Polanyi's critique of doubt to challenge scepticism towards the truth claims of the gospel, challenging rationalism and defending revelation using the problem of historiography as an apologetic for the necessity of

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[1110] Goheen(1999):80
[1111] Newbigin(1989e):223
[1112] Newbigin(1953):106
[1113] Newbigin(1948a):32

revelation for understanding human history. Newbigin then goes on to argue for God's strategy of election as a way of understanding how the specific revelation of the gospel can have universal implications for humanity. This again strengthens the innovation that this thesis brings to the study of Newbigin's work, namely recognising the centrality of revelation rather than election for Newbigin's theology. Newbigin balances his argument for the universality of the gospel for world history with the need for (re)contextualisation that takes other religions and cultures seriously. Newbigin then embarks on a deconstruction of the myth of secular societies; that is the claim for the neutrality of a secular state. Then crucially Newbigin argues for the unique role of the congregation to act as the hermeneutic of the gospel.

Newbigin charts the history of the church from "martyr church"[1114] to the church under the Constantinian settlement, which succumbed to the temptation "to use the secular power to enforce conformity to Christian teaching."[1115] Newbigin, as has been shown, despite accusations to the contrary from his critics, argues against both a retreat by the church into the private realm, which would be an abdication of its missionary responsibility in the public sphere, but also against "a return to coercion to impose beliefs."[1116] Newbigin argues that the church finds itself in a "radically new situation and cannot dream either of a Constantinian authority or of a Pre-Constantinian innocence."[1117] Newbigin offers the local congregation as the "primary reality of which we have to take into account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life."[1118] Newbigin gives the local congregation a crucial place in the revelation of God to humanity:

[1114] Newbigin(1989e):223
[1115] Newbigin(1989e):223
[1116] Newbigin(1989e):223-4
[1117] Newbigin(1989e):224
[1118] Newbigin(1989e):227

> "How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. I am of course, not denying the importance of the many activities by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel – evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences and even books such as this one. But I am saying that these are all secondary, and that they have their power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community."[1119]

This is a highly important passage to understand Newbigin's theology of evangelism and is worth exploring at length.

The congregation can only be the hermeneutic of the gospel if empowered by the Spirit

By describing the congregation as the "hermeneutic of the gospel" Newbigin emphasises the importance of the local congregation's participation in the mission of the Triune God. The above passage taken alone could be interpreted in a Pelagian framework, as Newbigin appears to be arguing that the sole responsibility for bringing non-Christians to faith in Christ is the effectiveness of the local congregation. But in the very same chapter, Newbigin has specifically argued against

> "the Pelagianism which tends to infect missionary thinking.. which supposes that the conversion of the word will be our achievement."[1120]

The other factor that militates against a Pelagian reading of this passage is the vital role that pneumatology has in Newbigin's ecclesiology; it is only as the Spirit-empowered community that the congregation can be the hermeneutic of the gospel. But the tension between the above passage and Newbigin's pneumatologial emphasis demonstrates that there is a dual nature in a congregation's existence; the congregation is to be both an active participator in God's mission and yet this participation is only possible due to the

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[1119] Newbigin(1989e):227
[1120] Newbigin(1989e):224

presence of the Spirit in the congregation as "empowering presence." [1121] This again confirms the contention that Newbigin's ecclesiology is centred around the twin foci of the congregation as a pneumatological and hermeneutical community.

4.5bii Profile of a hermeneutical congregation

The second implication of Newbigin's term "the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel" is the rejection of technique as the solution to a congregation's evangelistic effectiveness. Newbigin is not offering any programmatic suggestions as he refuses to succumb to any kind of Weberian 'instrumental rationalism.'[1122] Instead of new techniques or programmes Newbigin concentrates on the qualities of a congregation that enable it to function as the hermeneutic of the gospel and provides a six-fold description which will be briefly outlined below.

A community of praise

Newbigin notes that praise will be the congregation's most distinctive character, "as praise is an activity which is almost absent from modern society."[1123] Newbigin observes that under modernity a process of what Weber described as "disenchantment" took place, where it became regarded as unworthy to look "up to someone in admiration and love."[1124] This is a highly debatable cultural comment: some would argue that worship takes place regularly at the football stadium, the catwalk and the shopping mall. The difference between the Christian congregation and the rest of late-modern society is not the act of worship but rather the object of worship. Newbigin appears to be on stronger ground when he argues that the "Christian community meets as a community that acknowledges that it lives by the amazing grace of a boundless kindness"[1125] and he cites the contemporary emphasis on personal human rights and its discomfort with the

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[1121] Fee(1994)
[1122] Weber(1958)
[1123] Newbigin(1989e):227
[1124] Newbigin(1989e):228
[1125] Newbigin(1989e):228

idea of charity of any kind let alone divine charity. As far back as 1950 Newbigin has been stressing that "liturgical renewal is fundamental to the discharge of our evangelistic task in this day."[1126] Newbigin argues that the congregation is to be marked by an overflowing gratitude that "spills over into care for the neighbour."[1127] This is in marked contrast to Bauman's description of an individualised society that continually questions, "Am I my brother's keeper?"[1128] Significantly, when expounding his vision of the congregation as a community of praise, Newbigin does not develop the idea that praise is an anachronistic event. The worship of the congregation is an eschatological foretaste of Jesus' ultimate vindication and glorification. But elsewhere he does emphasise the place of worship as a sign to the world of God's kingdom. He points to the example of the church under communist persecution.

> "It is important to remember in the first place that there are situations in which the basic dogma in its starkest form is the most powerful critical agent in society. The celebration of the divine liturgy in the churches of the USSR for the seventy years in which Marxism has ruled public life, and the faithful preaching of the word in Lutheran churches for forty-five years in the German democratic republic, have been… immensely powerful in creating a space in which the total claims of the state were quietly set aside in deference to the one who is Lord of all states and kingdoms."[1129]

A community of truth

Newbigin articulates a faulty understanding of Berger's plausibility structures but nevertheless makes important observations regarding the social nature of all knowing. He offers the church as a community with a "healthy scepticism… which enables one to take part in the life of society without being bemused and deluded by its own beliefs about itself."[1130] Newbigin's insistence on the church's distinctiveness extends to the way the congregation will speak the truth such that it "must not be aligned to the techniques of modern propaganda, but must have the modesty, the sobriety, and the

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[1126] Newbigin(1950):143
[1127] Newbigin(1989e):228
[1128] Bauman(2001):71
[1129] Newbigin(1991g):67
[1130] Newbigin(1989e):228

realism which are proper to a disciple of Jesus."[1131] It might seem naïve of Newbigin to argue for the church to be an epistemologically distinct community when his larger missiological corpus argues that there is a constant dialectical relationship between church, gospel and culture. Firstly Newbigin is not a systematic theologian and secondly there is enough written in his wider body of work that proves that he does not claim a naïve realism for the church's grasp of biblical truth. Thirdly Newbigin is simply seeking to warn church leaders that the way to effective communication with those outside of the local congregation involves being truthful, and refusing to allow a naïve conception of the epistemological neutrality of various media that may be utilised in order to communicate the gospel. Newbigin warns of the techniques of modernity that may undercut rather than assist the church's mission. Although not mentioned in this context, within the wider context of "The Gospel in a Pluralist Society" the congregation as a community of the truth has a strongly eschatological emphasis. Newbigin has argued that indubitable knowledge is "only available when history has reached its terminus."[1132] Thus Christian belief is awaiting ultimate vindication at the end of history.

A community deeply involved in the concerns of its neighbourhood

Newbigin here identifies the missional nature of the congregation, with emphasis on holistic mission. For Newbigin the local congregation is the place where "good news overflows into good action,"[1133] as the congregation exists not for itself but for its neighbourhood. Thus the congregation will function as the hermeneutic of the gospel if it is a missional community as there is a demonstration of the incarnate love of God that does not stand aloof from human suffering but compassionately embodies the gospel in its praxis.

[1131] Newbigin(1989e):228
[1132] Newbigin(1989e):93
[1133] Newbigin(1989e):228

A community where people are prepared for the exercise of the priesthood in the world

Newbigin adopts another image to describe the missional nature of the congregation, the intermediary role between God and the world as it participates in Christ's priesthood. Newbigin emphasises that the priesthood of believers is "not within the walls of the church, but in the daily business of the world."[1134] The two major implications that Newbigin draws from this are firstly the need for the church to be a place of training and secondly that the congregation must operate as a body, encouraging individuals to exercise their diverse gifts for the sake of the communal witness. Goheen has written at length on Newbigin's advocacy of the calling of laity in the world.[1135]

A community of mutual responsibility

"If the church is to be effective in advocating and achieving a new social order in the nations, it must itself be a new social order."[1136] Here Newbigin contrasts the church with the "deepest root of contemporary malaise of Western culture"[1137] namely individualism. This is where Newbigin's vision of the congregation not simply as a "promoter of programmes for social change (although it will be that) but primarily as itself a revelation in foretaste of a different social order."[1138] This idea brings together two of Newbigin's themes: unity and eschatology. The church will be united not just at a macro-ecumenical level, but at a grass roots level; the life of the congregation is to be one of mutual care and responsibility and as such it will function as an eschatological foretaste.

[1134] Newbigin(1989e):230
[1135] Goheen(2002c)
[1136] Newbigin(1989e):231
[1137] Newbigin(1989e):231
[1138] Newbigin(1989e):231

A community of hope

Newbigin argues that the congregation, in marked distinction from the pessimism of "Western civilisation," is to be a community of hope. Newbigin states that the gospel "offers an understanding of the human situation which makes it possible to be filled with a hope which is both eager and patient even in the most hopeless situations."[1139] Newbigin re-emphasises that it is only through the indwelling of the gospel story that this confident and hope-filled Christianity will be possible and credible to a watching world. Thus understanding the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel provides the social context where the revelation of the gospel narrative, and particularly its eschatologically fuelled hope, becomes plausible.

Overall in this six-fold description of the congregation it is communal life that is emphasised, because for Newbigin the congregation is not primarily individual and secondarily communal as is so often the case with evangelical ecclesiologies; as Hunsberger laments the term church "tends to simply be a collective term for Christians."[1140] Newbigin's approach seems to resonate more closely with the orthodox theologian John Zizoulas who argues that the church is at heart not a meeting but an entity, a "way of being in communion."[1141] The communal life of the congregation is the ultimate apologetic of the gospel. In this integrating theme of the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel the key themes of Newbigin's revelatory ecclesiology - the congregation as united body, eschatological foretaste and missional community find cohesion.

[1139] Newbigin(1989e):232
[1140] Hunsberger(2003):118,120
[1141] Zizoulas(2000):1

The congregation and the gospel are inseparable

The third implication of Newbigin's term "the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel" is that the gospel is not just an orally transmissible piece of information. In Newbigin's theology of evangelism there is an inextricable link between the gospel and the local congregation. This is significant due to Newbigin's ardent defence of the use of the term "evangelism" to denote the oral proclamation of the gospel.[1142] Newbigin is adamant that the gospel is nothing less than the orally transmissible good news about Christ. Newbigin defended oral proclamation as the ecumenical mission community often sought to collapse evangelism into mission and more often than not this meant humanisation at the expense of evangelism, good works without the accompanying good word of the gospel. The emphasis on verbal evangelism corresponds with Newbigin's overall missiological project that the congregation is pivotal to God's revelation as God's intention is that the gospel is communicated as an embodied narrative. Newbigin describes mission as "an acted out doxology",[1143] thus the life of the congregation and the message of the gospel are one indivisible whole. As a message without medium is impossible so a medium without a message is purposeless, so for Newbigin there is this vital connection between the life of the congregation and the gospel it proclaims.

The significance of the hermeneutical community

Newbigin coined the phrased "the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel" at a time when hermeneutics as a discipline was being popularised: literary theory and semiotics were particularly in vogue and their implications for theology were being explored. But Newbigin's choice of words is not simply acquiescence to fashionable theology. By describing the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel Newbigin implies that the

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[1142] Newbigin(1982b):149
[1143] Newbigin(1989e):127

congregation is "the place where men and women and children find that the gospel gives them the framework of understanding, the "lenses" through which they are able to understand and cope with the world."[1144] Newbigin's use of the term hermeneutic was informed by his understanding of the sociology of knowledge, critical realist epistemology and linguistic theory. The philosophical sophistication of Newbigin's ecclesiology is not unique, but his ecclesiology has been consistent throughout the sixty years of his theological writing. Newbigin's ecclesiology developed out of his convictions about the nature of revelation and salvation, he then found philosophical and sociological resonance in the writings of three critical thinkers of the late twentieth century: Berger, Polanyi and MacIntyre, whose influence on Newbigin's conception of the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel will be examined. This resonance is highly important as it means that there was continuity in Newbigin's theological project despite an apparently major shift in his missiology on returning to England in the 1970s. The centrality of the doctrine of revelation persisted throughout Newbigin's theological life; he simply found different ways of articulating his theology and developed sociological and epistemological sophistication in his discourse.

4.5c Newbigin and Berger's Plausibility structures

Newbigin relies on the work of the sociologist Peter Berger for his approach to sociology of knowledge. The root proposition for sociology of knowledge is the Marxist assumption that "man's consciousness is determined by his social being."[1145] The relationship between rationality and social conditions is of great help to Newbigin's thesis that rationality is not a context-independent entity. Berger notes that it is sociology of knowledge "that offers the specifically contemporary challenge to

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[1144] Newbigin(1989e):127
[1145] Berger & Luckman(1967):17

theology."[1146] This is because of the way that some late-modern theorists have argued that if all knowledge is context-dependent there can be no such thing as universal truth.

The basic tenets of Berger's approach are that human beings generate the reality they perceive at both an objective and a subjective level. Berger calls this process 'world construction.'[1147] Humans produce cultural artefacts that exist outside of our minds and in that sense they are objective, but these artefacts are produced by our own projection of what is significant and important and in that sense the artefacts are subjective. In "The Social Reality of Religion", Berger applies his theory of world construction to religion, arguing that

> "Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality both as objective (as common taken for granted facticity) and subjective (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness) depends upon specific social processes, namely those processes that ongoingly reconstruct and maintain the social worlds in question. "[1148]

It is precisely these social processes that reconstruct and maintain social words that form the subject area for the sociology of knowledge. Berger outlines how the plausibility ("what people actually find credible"[1149]) of a socially constructed view of reality is dependent on the social support they receive. There are various social mechanisms and practices that help to assuage the doubt of a given belief. Berger names the practices that support the reigning worldview as "therapies"[1150] and the intellectual explanations and justifications of the worldview as "legitimations."[1151] Thus sociologists have the tools to explain the social facts of beliefs and belief systems without any need to interact with the truth claims the beliefs assume. In other words for Berger, in order for these socially constructed worlds to remain plausible to an

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[1146] Berger(1971):44
[1147] Berger(1967):79
[1148] Berger(1967):53
[1149] Berger(1971):50
[1150] Berger(1971):51
[1151] Berger(1971):51

individual, there must be a social support structure that continues to keep the belief alive. This is what Berger means by the term "plausibility structure"; a form of group legitimisation, and thus the social structure of religious practice can be seen as a plausibility structure.

At one level this seems to be a pessimistic view of religion as all truth claims are left ambivalent and religion seems to be relegated to a form of mass hysteria where the believer is kept in a state of belief by the affirmation of other believers. But problems arise when the all-encompassing method of this approach to knowledge is recognised. For example, under this approach, paedophilia is found reprehensible only due to its lack of social legitimation and in a different social setting it could be morally acceptable. Thus the relativising nature of sociology of knowledge can be seen. But this sociological approach to knowledge would also argue that if sufficient social support was provided for any belief, such as the earth being flat, then it would be found plausible, so a non-realist approach to epistemology is assumed by this view.

Berger's statement, that sociology of knowledge offers a serious challenge to theology, is understandable as it provides a way of understanding the church and other communities of faith as simply other socially constructed entities and "an explanation of belief that divests the specific case of its uniqueness and authority."[1152] Later Berger argues that sociology of knowledge is actually not a threat but an aid to theologians. For example, Berger argues that the radical or secular theologies that take as their starting point the alleged consciousness of modern man that, in the words of Bultmann, find it difficult in an age of electricity and radio to believe in the demon-infested world of the New Testament and therefore demythologise it. Berger shows how the sociology of knowledge helps to unmask a double standard where:

[1152] Berger(1971):54

> "the past... is relativised in terms of this or that socio-historical analysis. The present, however, remains strangely immune from relativisation. In other words the New Testament writers are seen as afflicted with a false consciousness rooted in their time, but the contemporary analyst takes the consciousness of his time as an unmixed intellectual blessing." [1153]

Berger argues that with the aid of sociology of knowledge it is possible to relativise the relativisers as the social influences on plausibility are exposed and thus all knowledge is socially conditioned. This would seem to lead to either radical relativism or solipsism but Berger argues it leads to "a new freedom and flexibility in asking questions of truth."[1154]

This brief overview of Berger's approach to sociology of knowledge allows us to evaluate Newbigin's appropriation of it in his apologetic work and to understand the relationship between epistemology, ecclesiology and evangelism. Both John Williams and Paul Weston argue that Newbigin has misinterpreted Berger. In his doctoral thesis, "Mission and Cultural Change: a critical engagement with the writings of Lesslie Newbigin", Weston takes part in a lengthy critique of Newbigin's use of Berger's plausibility structures. Weston firstly compares how Newbigin and Berger use the term "plausibility",[1155] quoting Robert Wuthnow who contends that Berger embarks on

> "sociological reductionism which explains away the reality of religion by attributing it to social conditions... there is some basis for this charge, given the fact that Berger seems to treat plausibility structures as somehow prior to, or more basic than, the religious beliefs they make plausible."[1156]

However Weston also defends Berger against the charge of sociological reductionism. Weston argues that Berger's concept of plausibility structures is an "analytical" rather than an evaluative tool, "as a 'sociologist of knowledge' [Berger] uses it to analyse social systems of thought and belief along with the processes by which they are held.

[1153] Berger(1971):58
[1154] Berger(1971):59
[1155] Weston(2001):181
[1156] Weston(2001):181

But he does not use it as an evaluative tool which aims to draw conclusions about the ultimate truthfulness of the beliefs thus analysed."[1157] This is a generous reading of Berger as it assumes there can be such an objectivity that separates out analysis and evaluation. As Polanyi's epistemology demonstrates this is a false dichotomy. Thus Berger can write:

> "The problem of 'social engineering' is then transformed into one of constructing and maintaining sub-societies that may serve as plausibility structures for the de-monopolised religious systems."[1158]
>
> "Migration between religious worlds implies migration between their respective plausibility structures… the same sociological-psychological problem is involved in evangelism and in the 'care of souls'."[1159]

It appears that for Berger the success of a religious group is dependent simply on its skills of social engineering. Because Berger precludes issues of truth, divine revelation or interaction he attempts to evaluate religion with the Enlightenment ideal of scientific detachment. Despite these methodological shortcomings, Berger's analysis can be a useful tool for exploring the social realities of theological convictions about the nature of the church.

Weston then turns to Newbigin's use of Berger's term "plausibility structure" and notes two main lines of critique. Firstly, he shows how Newbigin contends that Berger himself is operating within a powerful 'plausibility structure' that he does not acknowledge.[1160] Secondly, Weston notes that Newbigin "is not so aware that his own methodology is open to the same critique as the one he applies to Berger."[1161] Weston argues persuasively that Newbigin wants to defend the "essentially localised nature of

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[1157] Weston(2001):181
[1158] Berger(1971):58
[1159] Berger(1971):59
[1160] Weston(2001):185
[1161] Weston(2001):187

plausibility"[1162] which is evident in Newbigin's rejection of a "disembodied rationality" but that "there is a vital sense in which the human reasoning transcends the local situation"[1163], by which Weston appears to mean that Newbigin believes the gospel to be universally true. The flaw in Weston's argument is to assume that Newbigin relies on transcendent human rationality. This is clearly not the case as Newbigin has consistently relied on nothing else but the sovereign electing grace of God as the only transcendent basis on which any person comes to belief. This is another point at which the charge of fideism is raised against Newbigin, and as has been argued, this is unjustified as it is not faith in faith but rather a nuanced belief firstly in the ultimate sovereignty of God, secondly in a coherentist epistemology that is not dependent on supra-cultural rationality, thirdly in the congregation as the visible embodiment of this message and fourthly in the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. It is surprisingly late in his discussion that Weston briefly alludes to the most obvious difference between Newbigin and Berger's use of the term "plausibility structures," which is that Newbigin and Berger use the term plausibility structures in diametrically opposed ways. Newbigin defines plausibility structures as

> "patterns of belief and practice accepted within a given society, which determine which beliefs are plausible to its members and which are not."[1164]

Newbigin uses the term in the following ways:

> "the plausibility structure of the modern scientific worldview"[1165]
> "the modern scientific worldview functions as a plausibility structure"[1166]
> "a radically different vision of things from those that shape all human cultures apart from the gospel."[1167]
> "the church inhabits a plausibility structure at variance with, and which calls into question, those that govern all human cultures."[1168]

[1162] Weston(2001):187
[1163] Weston(2001):187
[1164] Newbigin(1989e):8
[1165] Newbigin(1986c):15
[1166] Newbigin(1986c):54
[1167] Newbigin(1986c):9
[1168] Newbigin(1986c):9

John Williams comments on this last quotation stating: "Newbigin clearly means by this the framework of ideas, the interpretive key, bequeathed to the church by the biblical story, which offers an alternative worldview to that prevailing in modern society. But for Berger the concept is rather the reverse."[1169] Newbigin does use the term "plausibility structure" synonymously with the term "worldview", whereas Berger defines plausibility structures not as the beliefs themselves but the edifice of social institutions that lend credibility to beliefs.[1170]

> "Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality as both objective (as common, taken for granted facticity) and subjective... depends upon specific social processes... [that] ongoingly reconstruct and maintain the particular worlds in question. Conversely, the interruption of these social processes threatens ... the reality of the worlds in question. Thus each world requires a social "base" for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This "base" may be called its plausibility structure[1171].

Thus in Berger's terms the congregation is the plausibility structure for the Christian faith as it provides legitimation through its teaching, therapies and rituals that help believers to sustain the socially constructed Christian worldview. Newbigin misreads Berger's definitions of plausibility structures and argues the complete opposite; that the beliefs provide the plausibility structures which are interpreted as the intellectual environment in which certain beliefs are plausible or not. This may well be due to Newbigin reading Berger through a Polanyian perspective. Weston observes that Newbigin has a prior commitment to Polanyi's epistemological approach. It may have helped Weston's thesis to have noted the parallels that Newbigin draws between Polanyi's use of the term "tradition" and Berger's term "plausibility structure." For example Newbigin introduces the term plausibility structure in "Gospel in a Pluralist Society" and then immediately goes on to state, "reason does not operate in a vacuum…

[1169] Williams(1993):373
[1170] Newbigin(1989e):373
[1171] Berger(1969):53-4

the definition of what is reasonable and what is not will be conditioned by the tradition within which the matter is discussed."[1172] Newbigin draws a parallel between Polanyi and, as will be shown, MacIntyre's use of the term tradition. Newbigin understands tradition to be the epistemological context that allows a belief to be plausible, and thus for Newbigin traditions are synonymous with plausibility structures. It is important to note that there is a relationship between tradition and plausibility structures but the terms are not equivalent as Newbigin assumes. There is a very close approximation to the concept of "plausibility structure" with Polanyi's term "conviviality." Despite Newbigin's glaring misunderstanding of Berger's term "plausibility structure" there is a great deal of merit in exploring Berger's insights to Newbigin's theology of evangelism.

If the local congregation is understood, as Berger assumes, as part of the Christian "plausibility structure" then Newbigin's commitment to the church as hermeneutic of the gospel has a direct parallel with Berger's thought. For Newbigin the congregation is the social environment in which the gospel appears plausible and this conceptualisation of the congregation as the locus of the ultimate legitimation of the gospel is central to Newbigin's thought. But Newbigin does not mean by this that it is possible to be socialised into Christian faith. Newbigin refrains from this sociological reductionism; as shown previously, he is passionately committed to the sovereign electing work of God. For Newbigin the local congregation is God's chosen instrument to be the pneumatological and thus eschatological location for revelation of the gospel to be plausible. From one aspect the congregation is the form of social legitimisation of the gospel, and it is by coming into contact with a congregation that truly believes and seeks to embody the gospel that the plausibility of the gospel story is increased. The local congregation becomes the interpretive lens through which the gospel story can be

[1172] Newbigin(1989e):9

experienced. Newbigin stresses that it does this because the gospel is actually historically and existentially true. This approach also fits well within a coherentist epistemological approach as the congregation provides the environment in which the coherent framework of the gospel is embodied and therefore its explanatory power can be seen as non-believers see the world from inside the perspective of the social context of the congregation.

There has been widespread acceptance of the importance of the social legitimation of the gospel by the local congregation and particularly, as Newbigin has pointed out, the way in which the worship of that congregation functions in forming the community. This has led to an increased interest in the way that liturgy and catechism function as a means of inducting people into the Christian worldview. This approach has been espoused by a number of scholars from a wide range of ecclesial backgrounds. Most notable are Andrew Walker[1173] from the Orthodox tradition, the Methodist William Abraham[1174] and Robert Webber[1175] from the bastion of North American evangelicalism Wheaton College. These authors are looking for ways to relate the concept of the congregation as a plausibility structure for the Christian faith to the way that both those in the congregation and those seeking to join it are inducted into the Christian faith. There are two kinds of liturgy, the explicit and the implicit. This is an important distinction as even churches that would describe themselves as non-liturgical churches have an implied liturgy.[1176] A liturgical emphasis in mission and ecclesiology is therefore emerging. M.M. Karecki argues that

> "both liturgy and mission have the kingdom of God as their concern; both are epiphanies of God's presence... liturgy brings the church in regular contact with

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[1173] Walker(1996):194
[1174] Abrahams(1991)
[1175] Webber(1999)
[1176] Johnson(2002):127

> the very source of its life by celebrating through ritual the kerygma of faith. In this way the church is formed as a witness to the world."[1177]

Unfortunately, this integral connection has been largely neglected, with missiologists tending to view liturgy as "cultic introversion," while liturgists (as well as systematic theologians and other theologians) often regard mission as little more than "extroverted activism."[1178] Because of the integrated approach that Newbigin's evangelistic theology provides there is a direct link between the worshipping life of the local congregation and its ability to function as the hermeneutic of the gospel. Thus as Newbigin has argued, rather than providing additional programmes for the congregation, or techniques based on Weberian instrumental rationality, the congregation must instead develop authentic engagement with God and authentic interpersonal communion in order to function as a genuinely hermeneutical community. The focus on liturgy and other aspects of ecclesial life that Healy describes as "church practices" is to shift away from the liberal and privatistic theologies and instead "to attend to the necessarily communal and active nature of Christianity."[1179] Most of the reflection in this area is on the formation of Christian character.[1180] Newbigin is interested in this area but more consistently his interest in liturgy and church practices is to encourage Christians to form communities that will embody the gospel and therefore assist its proclamation.

4.5d Newbigin and Polanyi's conviviality

As has been shown Polanyi defines conviviality as the "civic coefficients of intellectual passions."[1181] In the realm of science the findings of a particular researcher must be endorsed by the greater scientific community or the convictions will not achieve the

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[1177] Karecki, M.M. (1995) "Formation for Mission: Catechesis in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults" DTh thesis UNISA :2 cited Saayman(2000):16
[1178] Saayman(2000):16
[1179] Healy(2003):288
[1180] cited in Healy(2003):288
[1181] Polanyi(1962):203

status of scientific knowledge.[1182] Thus conviviality is the sociological mechanism of legitimation of a scientific belief, it has semantic overlap with Berger's "plausibility structures" but also a degree of differentiation. The terms 'conviviality' and 'plausibility structures' both allude to sociology of knowledge as they draw attention to the sociological context in which a belief is held. Conviviality is an adjective describing the degree to which a belief has gained sociological support within the necessary hegemonic legitimating social network. This leads on naturally to Foucaultian deconstruction of the knowledge/power dialectic within the scientific community. Plausibility structures relate to both the social environment that makes a belief appear rational but also to the rituals and mechanisms that continue to provide nourishment and support for these beliefs.

Newbigin makes very little use of the notion of conviviality. This is a missed opportunity as the concept provides another way of exploring how the local congregation functions as the hermeneutic of the gospel. Conviviality is an important part of Polanyi's epistemology as it is a partner concept with his approach to 'universal intent.' Polanyi's conception of personal knowledge is that truth claims are made with "universal intent."[1183] That is, truth claims will be communicated, and the response of others is important as "general unbelief imperils our own convictions by evoking an echo in us. Our vision must conquer or die."[1184] Newbigin makes explicit use of the term "universal intent" to describe his own understanding of the truth claims of the gospel, that although definitive proof cannot be marshalled for the gospel, nevertheless the Christian claims the truthfulness of the gospel universally.[1185] Polanyi recognises the difficulty in holding a belief in the face of widespread disbelief and thus introduces the

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[1182] Polanyi(1962):203
[1183] Polanyi(1962):65
[1184] Polanyi(1962):150
[1185] Newbigin(1989e):47

notion of conviviality to elucidate the need for the ratification of a truth claim by the members of the academy. The context of Polanyi's use of the term conviviality is to argue that science best proceeds when political concerns are not allowed to influence the scientific community. This concern for scientific freedom was influenced by Polanyi's experience as a scientist in a Marxist context and also due to a good experience of the camaraderie and "good fellowship" in a research group; "here he was gaining experience of working in a trusting but critical team; experience of what he would later call "conviviality" of intellectual work."[1186]

4.5e Newbigin and MacIntyre's bilingualism

Newbigin notes that all reasoning takes place within a linguistic framework. "Traditions of rationality are embodied in languages,"[1187] and it is in the work of Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre that tradition and language are explicitly linked. Newbigin relies on MacIntyre's work "Which Justice, Whose Rationality?"[1188] where MacIntyre argues along Wittgensteinian lines that "human experience is essentially linguistic."[1189] Berger concurs with this primacy of language over experience and also notes; "language provides the fundamental superimposition of logic on the objectivated social world."[1190] Many of the structuralist and post-structuralist philosophers of the late twentieth century argued that because of linguistic primacy, communities exist with incommensurable language games and therefore inter-community communication is impossible. MacIntyre argues the converse, that genuine communication is possible between different language games. MacIntyre talks about the possibility of bilingualism, having two first languages.[1191] Newbigin picks up on this idea and states:

[1186] Scott(1996):80
[1187] Newbigin(1989e):55
[1188] MacIntyre(1988)
[1189] Gadamer,H.(1976) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkley:Univeristy of Californa Press:18 cited in Sire(1995):103
[1190] Berger & Luckman(1967):82
[1191] MacIntyre(1988):375

"one learns to live so fully within both traditions that the debate between them is internalised. As a Christian I seek to live within the biblical tradition, using its language as my language, its models as my models through which I make sense of experience, its story is the clue to my story... but as a member of contemporary British society I am all the time living in, or at least sharing my life with, those who live in the other tradition. What they call self-evident truths are not self-evident to me, and vice versa...In so far as my own participation in the Christian tradition is healthy and vigorous, both in thought and practice, I shall be equipped for the external dialogue with the other tradition."[1192]

Thus Newbigin utilises the concept of bilingualism to argue against the complete incommensurability of the interpretive framework of the gospel and those of contemporary western cultures. Newbigin presents a philosophical apologetic for the possibility of (re)contextualising the gospel in any culture. Newbigin does not argue from this that the gospel can be grasped without the sovereign electing work of God, as he is keen to preserve the uniqueness of the Christian message and the impossibility of presenting a rationalistic apologetic of the gospel. There is a tension in Newbigin's thought, as there is in all reformed theology, that there is incumbent on the church the need to communicate the gospel in its communal life and in its verbal proclamation and yet to acknowledge divine sovereignty in choosing to use these means to bring salvation.

4.5f Doctrine of revelation and hermeneutic of the gospel

Newbigin's doctrine of revelation, soteriology and ecclesiology are intricately interconnected and find their integration point in his conception of the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel. For Newbigin God's special revelation is most clearly enunciated in the gospel which is most clearly communicated in the context of a community that embodies as well as proclaims it. This is not just a pragmatic approach but rests on Newbigin's theological conviction that God seeks to reconcile humanity vertically with himself but he also seeks horizontal reconciliation between human beings. The election of the body of Christ to act as a point of mediation between God

[1192] Newbigin(1989e):65

and unbelieving humanity is part of God's economy to bring revelation and reconciliation contemporaneously. This has been a founding and consistent principle in Newbigin's entire theological project. Newbigin's theological insight is profound and timely for evangelism in late-modern contexts; it is only perhaps surprising that Newbigin makes little use of the biblical support for his thesis found in the epistle to the Ephesians. Most of Newbigin's biblical warrant comes from a macro approach to scripture, as he explores the grand theme of election. As has been shown Newbigin was most at home exegeting the gospel of John. But the book of Ephesians with its high Christology, its emphasis on unity and its cosmic ecclesiology would have furnished Newbigin with useful biblical categories to articulate his central theological thesis.

Newbigin taps into much contemporary thought relating to the influence of community and language. Newbigin as an antifoundationalist thinker who has an awareness of the sociology of knowledge is able to turn the epistemological crisis he sees in western culture into a moment of opportunity for the recapturing of a biblical theory of knowledge. There is much to be said for a relational epistemology. Indeed as Stanley Grenz states: "in a world characterised by the presence of a plurality of communities, each of which gives shape to the identities of its participants, the Christian community takes on a new and profoundly theological importance as the people who embody a theological vision."[1193]

4.5g Believing and belonging

Newbigin's emphasis on the congregation as mediatorial community contrasts well with the sociological analysis of James Beckford who argues:

> "the important observation that religious believing seems to have become detached from religious belonging… should be understood in relation to the parallel observation that virtually all voluntary associations have been finding it difficult in the last few decades to attract and retain members. In other words,

[1193] Grenz(2003):252

> 'belonging' has been simultaneously losing its popularity in religion and in other fields as well."[1194]

Davie describes religion in modern Britian as "Believing without Belonging."[1195] The real issue in Davie's findings may point to increased nominalism and apathy

> "believing without belonging rarely represents a consciously selected personal package. It reflects instead the fall-back position acquired by British people when they simply do nothing."[1196]

In a more recent work she states:

> "the notion of a religious disposition, and denominational self-ascription- remain relatively high, whilst those that pertain to regular religious practice or the creedal statements of Christian doctrine have very markedly dropped."[1197]

Davie's phrase "believing without belonging" has been turned on its head and used as a motto by the emergent church[1198] movement. This movement in the western church has been calling for a reversal of the traditional order of creedal confession preceding congregational membership and instead arguing for the need for acceptance into community as a first step in coming to faith. Thus people need to "belong before they believe."[1199]

The emergent church movement is an interesting mix of modern and late-modern cultures. The emergent church has capitalised on the evangelical publishing industry's highly rationalised marketing mechanisms[1200]; and its message has been spread efficiently through the use of information technology[1201] often offering prescriptive

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[1194] Beckford (1992) "Religione et societa nel Rgno Unita" in *La Regione degli europei.* Turin: Edizioni della Foundazione Giovanni Agnelli:277 Davie cites from the text from the English original in Davie(1994):19 & 194

[1195] Davie(1994)

[1196] Davie(1994):199

[1197] Davie(2000):3

[1198] Kimball(2003); McLaren(2003)

[1199] Myers(2003):19 and Stuart Murray provides a useful twelvefold delineation of various ways of relating believing and belonging together ranging from the Christendom model where "Belonging is Believing" to the emergent church's emphasis on "Belonging before Believing." Murray(2005):10-22

[1200] For example Zondervan has set up a separate imprint called Emergentys.

[1201] http://www.opensourcetheology.net ; http://www.church.co.uk

solutions focussing on technique over theology.[1202] Yet the emergent church is a self-consciously postmodern movement, thoroughly eclectic in its influences.[1203] The movement recognises that in practice relationships are a key element in the conversion process of individuals.[1204] The movement is slowly discovering Lesslie Newbigin's work[1205] and his approach to the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel can provide the slogan "belonging before believing" with much-needed theological justification. Newbigin's work demonstrates that being part of the communal life of a congregation prior to personal belief is not just a sociologically observable tendency; it is part of the *Missio Dei* as the Spirit empowers the people of God to embody the gospel of Christ.

4.6 Summary

There is an integrating centre in Newbigin's revelatory ecclesiology with the conception of the congregation as a pneumatological hermeneutic of the gospel. Newbigin found in the epistemology of Polanyi and, despite a misreading in the work of Berger, philosophical and sociological support for his theological convictions about the mediatorial role of the congregation in evangelism. Newbigin's pneumatology insists on the work of the Holy Spirit to empower the church to be an embodiment of the gospel particularly through its unity, and thus an eschatological foretaste of the consummation of God's purposes in Christ Jesus. Within Newbigin's theological project, the church in general and the local congregation specifically are intrinsic to the gospel. Newbigin follows Zizoulas[1206] arguing that the church offers a model of being as communion.

[1202] Myers offers a 5 step process to solve a church's community difficulties. Myers(2003):139-140

[1203] As can be seen by the title of McLaren, B. (2004) *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan

[1204] Finney (1992):43 provides statistical evidence to support this. In a survey of 500 people 27% said that a family member was the main reason they had come to faith. Whilst 15% of men and 24% of women said that a Christian friend was the main reason they had come to faith.

[1205] Emergent church UK's annual conference for 2005 is called "Following the Newbigin trail".

[1206] Newbigin(1994d):109 Zizoulas is actually quoted.

Within a late-modern context this recapturing of the biblical conception of the nature of the church is highly significant as Goheen comments that Newbigin

> "was not first an academic theologian but a missionary and a churchman with a wealth of experience almost unmatched. He began the task of bringing the biblical perspective of mission to bear on many traditional ecclesiological themes. It remains for others to work this out in a more systematic and comprehensive way, both in theological reflection and ecclesial practice."[1207]

[1207] Goheen(2002):368

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

- Quo Vadis?

This thesis has explored the resources that Lesslie Newbigin's theological project provides for a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures. Newbigin's triangular model of missionary communication provided the structure for the thesis and the three corners of gospel, cultures and congregation have allowed the relationship between special revelation, general revelation and ecclesiology to be explored.

This thesis has followed the hint given by the grand sweep of Newbigin's theology to locate the theology of evangelism under the rubric of the doctrine of revelation. Locating evangelism within the main stream of systematic theology is in itself innovative as typically evangelism is relegated to the realms of pastoral or practical theology, which is often left bereft of the insights of two thousand years of theological reflection and instead left in the hands of the social scientists. The contours of Newbigin's approach to the gospel as special revelation have been examined and the significance of the gospel as a historical, particular and Christocentric narrative have been explored for their epistemological and soteriological implications. Next Newbigin's approach to general revelation and the implications for his approach to divine revelation in different cultures and non-Christian religions were explored. Finally Newbigin's revelatory approach to ecclesiology was investigated and a new integration of the diverse elements of Newbigin's multifaceted approach to the doctrine of the church was provided.

In every chapter some of the implications of Newbigin's work for a (re)contextualised theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures have been investigated. It is now time

to assess the usefulness of Newbigin's doctrine of revelation for providing resources for a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures and to make some programmatic suggestions for further research.

Newbigin's triangular conception of missionary communication has been adopted as the organising principle for this thesis and analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of this model provides a helpful way to explore Newbigin's usefulness in the development of a contextualised theology of evangelism.

5.1 Weaknesses of Newbigin's approach

The weaknesses of Newbigin's approach centres around the cultural corner of his triangular approach to missionary communication. George Hunsberger's doctoral thesis "Bearing the Witness of the Spirit" examined Newbigin's theology of cultural plurality and his analysis of Newbigin's theology is excellent. He argues that Newbigin provides the church with powerful resources for engaging with cultures and notes three key areas where Newbigin's approach to cultural plurality is groundbreaking. Firstly, Hunsberger argues that Newbigin provided resources for churches in the West to "engage their 'own' culture in a missionary way."[1208] The significance of this cannot be overstated. Newbigin popularised a way of engaging critically with cultures that were assumed to be Christian under the Christendom model. Secondly Hunsberger notes the important contribution that Newbigin played in helping the western church to begin to investigate the degree to which cultural accommodation had taken place within the church. Thirdly Hunsberger insightfully argues that Newbigin provided resources for the church to understand its calling to communicate the gospel in its own congregational culture. These are all valid and important observations and Newbigin has been a prophetic voice

[1208] Hunsberger(1998):278

in these areas of the church's mission. Yet this thesis argues that the main weakness in Newbigin's doctrine of revelation is in the relationship between gospel and cultures.

The thesis has outlined three main areas of criticism of Newbigin's approach to cultures. Firstly due to an over-emphasis on the history-of-ideas approach, Newbigin did not engage sufficiently with popular culture, particularly with the onset of late-modernity with the blurring of the distinction between "high" and "low" culture.[1209] Newbigin's work could benefit from an engagement with the everyday lives of ordinary people. This was a strength of Newbigin's work in India as can be seen in his account of engaging with the practical and existential struggles of the ordinary men and women in his Bishopric as recorded in his "South India Diary."[1210] In this book more than any other Newbigin's pastoral warmth and great affection for people shines through. There is also an instance where Newbigin engages in this approach in a Western context recorded in an article called: "The Pastor's Opportunities: Evangelism in the City."[1211] Here Newbigin draws on his experience as a pastor in a small struggling urban congregation in Birmingham where he surveys the sense of hopelessness felt by the inhabitants of the Urban Priority Area in which his congregation was situated. Newbigin demonstrates local knowledge through conversations with representatives of different ethnic groups and generations within the vicinity. But these are rare and isolated examples from Newbigin's large corpus of writing, and when this body of literature is taken as a whole there is very little engagement with what one could call "low culture." This criticism is levelled at his writings rather than his personal practice as it appears Newbigin's example and his theological writings are at odds. It seems from regarding Newbigin's missionary practice he has a more personal touch to his evangelism and apologetics than the style he adopts in his writing; his actual praxis in evangelism

[1209] Walker(1996):155-157
[1210] Newbigin(1951)
[1211] Newbigin(1987b)

appears to be grounded in the life experiences and needs of those to which he sought to reach. This disjunction between Newbigin's praxis and his theological reflection is most probably unintentional. On his return to England Newbigin sought to map the intellectual landscape of the late-modern post-Christian West and this developed in ways far beyond his expectations, as can be seen from Newbigin's comments on the response to "The Other Side of 1984" when he wrote "ever since then I have puzzled about the fact that such a brief, hastily written paper could have had such a reception."[1212] Newbigin's work on mission to modernity gathered momentum and his pastoral warmth and wisdom was not communicated in this phase of his theological writings; as a result he may well have unintentionally fathered a school of Christian cultural criticism which did not resemble his praxis.

Secondly, as has been shown, due to a flawed secularisation thesis, which was followed by an underdeveloped description of western cultures as paganised, Newbigin did not engage with the nascent spirituality of late-modern people. In his work "Honest Religion for Secular Man"[1213], Newbigin subscribed, along with the majority of commentators, to the view of secularisation held by Harvey Cox in his seminal "The Secular City"[1214], that predicted the end of spiritual interest with the further development of modernity. Newbigin describes his own secularist offering as a "flirtation."[1215] Again in his essay "Evangelism and the City" Newbigin notes that it is the "Anglo-Saxon" residents who were the most resistant group to the gospel. Newbigin argues that the other ethnic groups in his parish "know that God is the great reality, even if we may judge that their knowledge of him is imperfect."[1216] Newbigin seems to draw a parallel between ethnic distinctions and belief in spiritual reality, the implication being

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[1212] Newbigin(1993):252
[1213] Newbigin(1966a)
[1214] Cox(1964)
[1215] Wainwright(2000):343ff
[1216] Newbigin(1987b)

that Anglo-Saxons are not spiritually inclined. Later Newbigin would argue that the West is not a secular society but a pagan[1217] one, and yet there is little engagement with this pagan spirituality. A theology of culture that took seriously the issues of general revelation and particularly the concept of the *Sensus Divinitatis* would find it hard to subscribe to this particular kind of secularisation thesis and would spend more time looking for points of spiritual engagement. John Drane offers an alternative approach to dealing with late-modern spirituality by engaging with the spiritual quest of those influenced by the New Age movement. As an example Drane uses a highly controversial method of sharing the gospel, offering to guide people spiritually using Tarot cards at psychic fairs, then using the biblical imagery as a point of contact for the gospel.[1218] This is not to offer a programmatic proposal for imitation but is a way that Newbigin's paganisation theme may have been developed into praxis. Drane's method affirms the notion of the 'spiritual quest' that the concept of the *Sensus Divinitatis* affirms, and he uses it to generate innovative ways to share the gospel.

Thirdly, Newbigin's approach to evangelism in a pluralist society appears to be to address the commonalities in "worldview" shared by the various subcultures. Newbigin addresses issues such as the dichotomy between fact and value and the difficulties in presenting the gospel as true in societies that have been influenced by Cartesian rationalism. Newbigin's apologetic approach is to ignore the cultural diversity present in what he describes as a "pluralist society" and to focus on the lowest common denominator meta-cultural assumptions. This compromises Newbigin's commitment to the (re)contextualisation of the gospel as he offers no advice, models or examples on how to contextualise the gospel into the various subcultures that make up western societies. Newbigin also does not sufficiently explore what a multi-cultural

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[1217] Newbigin(1985d):31
[1218] Drane(2000a):33-35

congregation that paid close attention to cultural distinctives yet celebrated authentic unity in Christ could look like.

Fourthly and most importantly, due to a tension in Newbigin's theology between classical reformed doctrine and Barthianism, Newbigin ultimately had an underdeveloped doctrine of general revelation and thus did not make sufficient use of the resources provided by general revelation for evangelism. For example, Newbigin had an overwhelmingly negative approach towards modernity: it is rare to find an example of appreciation of modern western cultures in Newbigin's writings and he is unable to locate points of contact between gospel and culture. In practice as far as western cultures are concerned he has effectively succumbed to what Niebuhr would describe as the "Christ against culture"[1219] approach. A theology of culture that was informed by a more rounded doctrine of revelation would include a discriminating appraisal of cultures that is both positive and negative. Newbigin leaves little room for the work of the Spirit in western cultures, although Newbigin has a high pneumatology and consistently states that conversion is "a mysterious work of the sovereign Holy Spirit,"[1220] however the work of the Spirit is seen primarily through the formation of an authentic congregation. A theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures would take time to look for signs of common grace in all cultures and use them to build a bridge for gospel communication. On one occasion Newbigin draws attention to both common grace and the preparatory work of the Spirit in non-believers[1221] but this is again an isolated and individualistic example. In Newbigin's theology of cultures there is no mention of the Spirit or of common grace at work in the culture at large. For example the intensification of a sense of spirituality as the mechanistic reductionism of modernity is rejected and the persistence of the discourse of ethical and moral rights in

[1219] Niebuhr(1956):45
[1220] Newbigin(1987b):356
[1221] Newbigin(1989e):180

increasingly ethically relativistic cultures, are but two examples of areas in late-modern cultures that could provide a bridge point for gospel communication that Newbigin does not utilise.

Programmatically there is room for further research into the relationship between the theology of cultures and general revelation, as this seems a particularly sparse field at present. Theology of cultures has often been more heavily weighted towards sociology and anthropology and the works on the doctrine of revelation often give scant attention to general revelation and no attention at all as to how this general revelation is affected or nuanced by cultural and sociological contingencies.

5.2 Strengths of Newbigin's approach

Despite these criticisms of Newbigin's theological approach to evangelism, his doctrine of revelation provides rich resources for developing a theology of evangelism for late-modern cultures. The strengths of Newbigin's approach centre around renewed confidence in the gospel, humility in the face of divine revelation, an emphasis on (re)contextualisation and the necessity of ecclesial embodiment of the gospel.

Confidence in the gospel as revelation

Newbigin's heavy emphasis on the gospel as revelation leads him to challenge the often-assumed requirement for the gospel to measure up to external standards of rationality. Newbigin exhibits a confidence in the gospel that comes from his conceptualising the evangelist as one who is simply passing on a revealed message. This sense of confidence is sadly lacking in much contemporary evangelism. A vicious circle of marginalisation and timidity has formed as the church has lacked confidence in proclaiming the gospel; then as the church has become more timid it has become more irrelevant and marginalised, and as the church's marginalisation has increased so has its

timidity. Newbigin offers an interesting perspective on the lack of conviction in evangelism stating

> "if our own culture has proved bankrupt, and if all expressions of the gospel are culturally embodied it is understandable that a collapse of confidence in our culture goes along with a faltering confidence in the gospel."[1222]

This statement seeks to make sense of the marginalisation of the church as it recongnises the huge influence the institutional church used to hold over the wider culture. Thus in a time of cultural flux, the old answers to life no longer hold weight and Christianity is rejected along with modern culture. This is what is referred to in the description of the contemporary western context as "Post-Christendom". The warning reputedly attributed to D.W.R. Inge that "a church that is married to the spirit of its age will find itself widowed in the next"[1223] seems apposite; the wedding between the church and the rationalism of modernity has left the church bereaved and bereft in late-modernity, and thus the church finds it difficult to attract late-modern people to hear its message. Newbigin calls the church back to a confidence in the authority of the one who called and betrothed her, the all-powerful "Christ our eternal contemporary."[1224] By calling the church back to the supremacy of Christ and to place her confidence neither in rational acceptability nor political power but on the authority of the Lord that has given her the gospel invitation to pass on, Newbigin provides the church in late-modern cultures with the opportunity to regain its lost confidence. The need for assurance is particularly acute in a multi-cultural society where the Christian consensus enjoyed under Christendom has been lost. In fact the confidence that the western church has lost may well have been a false confidence based more on political power than on the power[1225] of the gospel and thus the path to the renewal of the church may well lie through mission in late-modernity. The church is called to faithfulness and it is with the

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[1222] Newbigin(1989e):191
[1223] Drane(2000):35
[1224] Newbigin(1968)
[1225] Newbigin(1989e):191

end of Christendom that the church has the opportunity to realign her allegiance from self-assured self-confidence to a radically gospel-centred divine trust.

Programmatically, further research into a missionary spirituality for late-modern Christians would provide clues as to the kinds of liturgy, spiritual disciplines, corporate structures and training programmes that would help to foster an authentic and growing confidence in the gospel in the current cultural context. Reflection on the spirituality that sustained the early church as a minority faith in a hostile cultural context may provide some clues though the issues complicated by the post-Christendom context.

Dynamic humble faithfulness in gospel communication

Newbigin's emphasis on the dialogical relationship between the gospel, culture and church provides an opportunity to guard against the twin dangers of cultural imperialism and relativistic syncretism. By emphasising these three dynamic and dialogical relationships Newbigin encourages accountability, humility and self-examination. In late-modern cultures that are both increasingly self-reflective and more aware of the perspectival nature of human knowing, Newbigin's model allows for, to borrow a phrase from David Bosch, "bold humility."[1226] This is humility that is open to benefit from the critique of other cultures to assist more faithful interpretations of the gospel and to expose any gospel compromise that may have been made with the missionary's host culture. But Newbigin's model allows for boldness in that it affirms the revelatory nature of the gospel, which is not just another socially constructed cultural artefact, it is revelation from God that has been culturally embodied. Therefore there is a message to be boldly proclaimed because it has been given as a gift to the church for the world.

[1226] Bosch(1990):420

Newbigin describes the process of missionary communication as "a complex and unpredictable evolution both in the culture of the receptor community and in that of the missionary."[1227] This open-ended and dynamic conception of communication is particularly well-suited to the current intellectual climate as it echoes movements in literary criticism such as intertextuality and *différance*[1228] which emphasise the need to be open to the text and to allow for surprising readings of the text which celebrate the fusing of the two horizons of reader and text. Newbigin's approach to missionary communication leaves this same openness to the other without surrendering the concept of authorial intent, which results only in relativism and leaves a genuine encounter with the other impossible, replacing it only with a narcissistic journey of self-discovery. Newbigin's approach does not suffer from the naïve realism so prevalent in many modernist conceptions of missionary communication that leave no space for the missionary's fallibility or cultural captivity. Newbigin's adoption of Polanyi's epistemology and particularly his appropriation of the concept of "universal intent" also provide an epistemological basis for bold humility. This gives epistemological warrant for the kind of open but purposeful dialogue that is lacking in much evangelistic practice as often either dialogue has no evangelistic agenda or evangelism has no dialogical emphasis.

There is an opportunity for research into models of Christian evangelistic dialogue in late-modern contexts. How can Christians be equipped to be confident in the gospel and yet humble and open to other perspectives that would assist and challenge their preconceptions about their own faith? How can the structures and programmes of the church be audited in terms of their acquiescence to modernist assumptions? What

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[1227] Newbigin(1995h):147
[1228] A term Derrida coined in 1968 see Lechte(1994):107

models of Christian education and communication can be developed that will allow bold humility?

(Re)contextualised communication

Newbigin's theology of evangelism aims to walk the tightrope between irrelevance and faddishness, between imperialism and syncretism, between privileging a culturally bound reading of the gospel and a gospel denying baptism of every cultural practice. Newbigin is able to argue both for the authority of the revealed gospel and for the translation of the gospel into cultural forms and idioms that are appropriate for genuine communication.

Modernity favoured uniformity and mass production and these values affected the church's approach to evangelism. In many ways Weber's analysis of "the natural concern to identify the most optimum and efficient ways to achieve given ends" would always result in "the emergence" of what he called "formal rationality"[1229] or occidental rationalism. Weber's thesis is particularly interesting because in "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" he charts the influence of Calvinistic Protestantism as the dominant influence in shaping the rationalisation of modernity, and now through Drane's appropriation of Ritzer's[1230] exposition of Weber in his "McDonaldisation of the Church"[1231] the circle is completed as rationalisation is shown to have affected and infected the Western Church. Nicholas Gane describes the process of rationalisation as the "transition from value-rationality to instrumental reason."[1232] Weber's project can be seen to be the convergence of two streams; firstly rationalisation and secondly disenchantment. Rationalisation is the process by which by which "the application of

[1229] Drane(2000b):28
[1230] Ritzer(2000)
[1231] Drane(2000b)
[1232] Gane(2002):8

rational calculation to the furtherance of definite goals"[1233] is applied to more and more areas of life and society. Weber's rationalisation thesis appears to be sound but the disenchantment thesis is flawed for the same reason that most secularisation theses argued for the decline in religion whereas what is now being experienced is a realignment of religious affiliation. The movement is away from traditional, bureaucratised religious institutions and towards a more eclectic individualistic spirituality. As David Hay and Grace Davie have shown in separate ways, spirituality continues but is not expressed through church affiliation or attendance. Nevertheless the rationalisation of the church in general and evangelism in particular is an important area of research as it is through a thorough examination of the effects of rationalisation that the cultural acquiesce of the church's praxis to modernity's values can be seen. There is room for a critique of evangelistic practice in light of the critique of modernity's propensity towards technical rationality in general and efficiency in particular. Drane's McDonaldisation of the church is a worthy but necessarily preliminary and popular attempt at this and a more thorough work would provide useful clues for late-modern evangelism.

Secondly there is an urgent need for models of multi-culturally contextually-sensitive congregations; without such research there will be a tendency to adopt "the one size fits all"[1234] approach that Pete Ward warns against. These projects would probably be best undertaken by a non-western researcher who would have the cultural distance to perceive the influence of technical rationality on evangelism. Drane comments that this kind of rationality is not universally negative, as some of its effects have been beneficial to public life. This is an important point, as this thesis has criticised Newbigin for

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[1233] Giddens(1971):184
[1234] Ward(2002b):19

adopting an overly negative view of modernity; looking for the signs of common grace in modernity is equally important as the culture is continually in flux.

Ecclesial embodiment

Newbigin's model of missionary communication presents a high ecclesiology, as the congregation is given an irreplaceable role in the revelation of the gospel. The congregation is the mediator of the gospel due to the way that the gospel narrative demands embodiment. This coheres well with the insights into the sociology of knowledge that affirm this is the way beliefs form and flourish. Newbigin's ecclesiology argues that the church must live up to its calling as the elect people of God, called to be a light to the nations. In late-modern cultures authentic community is rare; local congregations empowered by the Spirit can be a foretaste of the community people long for. In late-modern cultures praxis is as important as truth claims as a culture of "spin" has fostered almost universal scepticism; thus the congregation is called to demonstrate the truth of the gospel in its life. Modernity aimed at clean and efficient solutions through the use of technical rationality; late-modernity reacts against these often reductionist and superficial solutions to complex problems. Newbigin's emphasis on the congregation providing an authentic taste of gospel life militates against "quick fix" solutions and instead urges the congregation to get busy with the hard work of being the church. Newbigin's approach also challenges the congregation that authentic spiritual life is only possible by reliance on the Holy Spirit whose values are the opposite of instrumental rationalism: he is unpredictable in his actions, non-quantifiable in his ministry, efficiency is not his priority and he brings unity not uniformity.

Newbigin's emphasis on the ecclesiologically embodied gospel refocuses evangelism as a primarily corporate witness. This is in marked contrast with the majority of works on

evangelism where "personal evangelism" is the priority. Newbigin, as has been shown right from the very beginning of this thesis, does not advocate an ecclesiological presence in the community as the whole task of evangelism, as he very deliberately defines evangelism in terms of an orally transmitted message, which undeniably emphasises the need for personal witness as the gospel must at some stage be proclaimed by an individual. But Newbigin's innovative approach to evangelism comes in his emphasis on the corporate witness, the embodied narrative, the culture of the congregation as providing, in Newbigin's flawed utilisation of Berger, the "plausibility structure" that is the sociological context in which the truth of the gospel makes best sense. Research opportunities exist in the exploration of the effects that an emphasis on personal evangelism has had on the gospel that has been communicated. There is a need for research into the theological status of para-church organisations and on the relationship between congregations and para-church organisations and to explore new models of para-church and church co-operation.

5.3 Evangelism and revelation

This thesis has explored Lesslie Newbigin's implicit theology of evangelism from the perspective of his doctrine of revelation. By locating evangelism under the rubric of the doctrine of revelation a number of important implications follow.

Firstly, evangelism is no longer demoted to the subsidiary discipline of pastoral theology which seems to be a catch-all classification for those awkward parts of the congregational life that do not fit well within the assumed "mainstream" systematic classifications. This means that the wealth of centuries of theological reflection on divine revelation can be brought into the service of the evangelistic mission of the church, and equally the praxis of the church's mission can be used to ground academic theology. From a research perspective there are opportunities to further explore the

interface between general revelation and special revelation. There is scope for more work on the way in which the congregation functions theologically and epistemologically as the hermeneutic of the gospel.

Secondly, the sovereignty of God in evangelism is maintained in an often Pelagian discipline. Divine revelation almost by definition assumes the sovereign grace of God in deciding how and to whom God will reveal himself. Research opportunities exist in the exploration of the effects of the implicit theological assumptions held by those actively engaged in evangelism and the way that these theological perspectives motivate and sustain those in frontline evangelism. This would provide resources for developing liturgies, spiritual disciplines and practices that could help release the church into evangelism.

Thirdly and consequently, revelation is a divine prerogative and equally divine reconciliation with fallen humanity is a divine prerogative. Evangelism is not simply part of the mission of the church; it is fundamentally part of the mission of God. Thus there is an important statement being made by locating evangelism under the rubric of the doctrine of revelation in linking the mission of the church with the *Missio Dei*. By viewing evangelism as part of the divine reconciliatory revelation, evangelism is thus integrally situated within the heart of salvation history.

Fourthly, Newbigin's theological reflection successfully integrates both the doctrine of revelation and ecclesiology through the mediating discipline of missiology.[1235] Ecclesiology is often examined in isolation from the doctrine of revelation, but through the post-liberal movement which has integrated Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis, the role of the community and the significance of narrative, there has been greater attention

[1235] Luzbetak(1993):14

given to the context in which the gospel is to be communicated, namely the local congregation. Newbigin's missional ecclesiology successfully integrates these grand schemes in dogmatic theology. There are research opportunities for the further exploration of how the doctrines of reconciliation, revelation and ecclesiology can be further integrated.

5.4 The future of evangelism

The academy and evangelism have ignored each other for too long. Evangelism without theology is blind and theology without evangelism is lame. Clear-sighted evangelists are needed so that the critical dialogue between gospel, culture and congregational life can work in concert to communicate the gospel faithfully and effectively. Able-bodied theologians are needed to help the church utilise the resource of centuries of theological refection so that the church can be equipped for the task for which she was called and commissioned. Newbigin was an exemplar of both these facets as he was both an evangelist theologian and a theological evangelist. Towards the end of his life Newbigin was asked to consider the future of mission in the western world; whilst eschewing any claim to be a prophet or a futorologist[1236] he was drawn into a prediction of the future of mission, his words on that occasion are a challenge for more research in the field of the theology of evangelism for late modern cultures.

> "My guess … is that it will be in the unspectacular growth of small congregations… that the gospel will be communicated in the coming decade… "[M]odern" Western culture will continue to strengthen its grip on the life of human communities everywhere and – therefore – Christian churches that have so long accepted a syncretistic co-existence with the "modern" worldview will continue to bear the prime responsibility for articulating a Christian message for this particular culture. That remains a task which calls for the best intellectual and spiritual energies that we can bring to it."[1237]

[1236] Newbigin(1991i):23
[1237] Newbigin(1991i):26

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